

TOP STORY: SEXLESS IN AMERICA

January 9-22, 1995

In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

WHAT'S REALLY WRONG WITH WELFARE

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would have you believe

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E D I T O R I A L

LIFE ON THE HEALTH CARE ASSEMBLY LINE

The corporatization of medicine continues to accelerate in the wake of Congress' inaction on health care reform. Last year, mergers and acquisitions of hospitals, clinics, medical laboratories and pharmaceutical companies climbed in value to \$42 billion, more than any other industry's total. In this process, the number of uninsured Americans has also risen to new heights—in two years from 37 million to 39 million uninsured. And, as HMOs have come to dominate the field, millions of those with insurance have lost the right to choose their own doctors. In three years—from 1991 to 1994—the percentage of people insured on the job who must use HMOs has jumped from 47 percent to 65 percent.

The corporate spokespeople for these increasingly giant corporations say that's just fine. Kenneth Abramowitz, a market analyst with Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. in New York, points out that "corporations produce hotel rooms and toothpaste and automobiles, and the country does fine." So why not health care?

And, indeed, from the point of view of overall cost, HMOs have some advantages over fee-for-service providers. By offering the whole range of medical services for a fixed price, HMOs tend to encourage preventive care, which is good for those insured and which over the long run will reduce the amount of care each person needs. By paying a doctor or hospital a fixed amount, HMOs also discourage the use of superfluous or questionable tests and procedures, as well as lengthy hospital stays. This, too, saves money. But making money, not saving it, is the purpose of for-profit corporations, and the likelihood is that the savings that for-profit HMOs achieve will simply go toward profit and the administrative costs of competing for dominance in the market. (See "Mismanaged care," page 34.)

Right now, some HMO advocates note that health insurance premiums in California are projected to decline by 10 percent over the next year. But this apparent savings

is the result of fierce competition in which some of the more heavily capitalized HMOs may even be offering premiums at a loss in order to gain control of the market. Once the smaller or weaker firms are out of the way—once one or two, or even three firms control a market—prices will rise again.

Indeed, even now, according to John C. McDonald, chief executive of the Mullikin Medical Centers in Long Beach, Calif., HMOs are making extraordinary profits. "They're taking one-third off the top and using that money to expand in other parts of the country," McDonald claims. Others also attack HMOs for spending from 15 percent to 30 percent of their revenues on marketing and administrative costs.

Defenders in the industry say that's not out of line with other industries. Alan Hoops of Pacificare Health Systems, an investor-owned HMO based in Orange County, explains that health care "is no different from any other business." But that's just the problem. Health care should be a universal right, not a business in which the bottom line is the final determinant of quality and extent of care. That's the crux of the matter. There's no doubt that HMOs will assiduously cut costs. But they will be under constant pressure to do so to improve the bottom line, not to benefit patients. Doctors' fees will be cut, which in many cases will be no tragedy, but which in some cases will mean that a patient needing a highly skilled specialist will be denied his or her services because the price is too high. And while it's good to cut back on unneeded tests, the pressure will be to deny tests in cases where different doctors disagree on their advisability. In short, the HMO can make more money if it chooses not to provide an x-ray, doesn't order a second opinion or decides to discharge a patient from the hospital prematurely.

The ongoing corporatization of health care leaves patients behind in the race for higher profits.

As one California physician observes, managed care is fine, "But who are the managers and why do they manage?"

Right now HMOs are on their best behavior.

They know that health care reform is still an issue in many people's minds. But if public interest subsides, down the road we can expect them to behave just like General Motors or Dow Chemical. From a health point of view, and ultimately from a cost point of view, allowing the insurance industry to control health care providers is, at best, risky business. ◀

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(ISSN 0160-5992)

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This issue (Vol. 19, No. 4) published January 9, 1995 for newsstand sales January 9-22, 1995



InTHESE TIMES

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LETTERS

Prepackaged
vs. unwashed

In your November 28 letters, America Online-user Al Levin rebuts David Futrelle by saying AOL-er's are at least "off the dime and learning." If you're using AOL, you aren't learning. AOL pre-selects the options you'll have, offering celebrity appearances and prepackaged entertainment.

AOL isn't disdained for the technologies they don't have. The internet is made up of people swapping information freely; on AOL, a corporation intervenes, and AOL users choose from a pool of promotional material provided by mass-media players. (The most egregious example is AOL's "McDonald's Interactive" area.) In the chat areas, the topics "hackers" and "riot grrls" are prohibited, and AOL removes postings if

they object to their content.

Note also that AOL does *not* carry complete daily editions of the *New York Times*; it only runs excerpts from each of the sections. Significantly, the only section they carry in full is the entertainment section!

On the internet, people bypass the mass media altogether. Maybe that's why reporters are so quick to write us off. Instead of supporting our Free Speech agenda, they dismiss us as "bizarre" and "anarchic" in un-rebuttable articles—portraying alternative opinions as a chorus of freaks. Reporters will eventually have to confront the unwashed masses, though. Even David Futrelle now posts to alt.aol-sucks.

David Cassell

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Blind faithlessness

Salim Muwakkil claims that "over the past several years, it has become increasingly clear that federal assistance to urban America is going to remain too meager to make a real difference. Development, in an era of deficits, will have to begin from within or not begin at all." ("Inner-city Assets," Dec. 12) It's easy to accept the second statement, but those of us who have been battling over the past years to change federal spending priorities never accepted the first statement, and to do so now would be very dangerous.

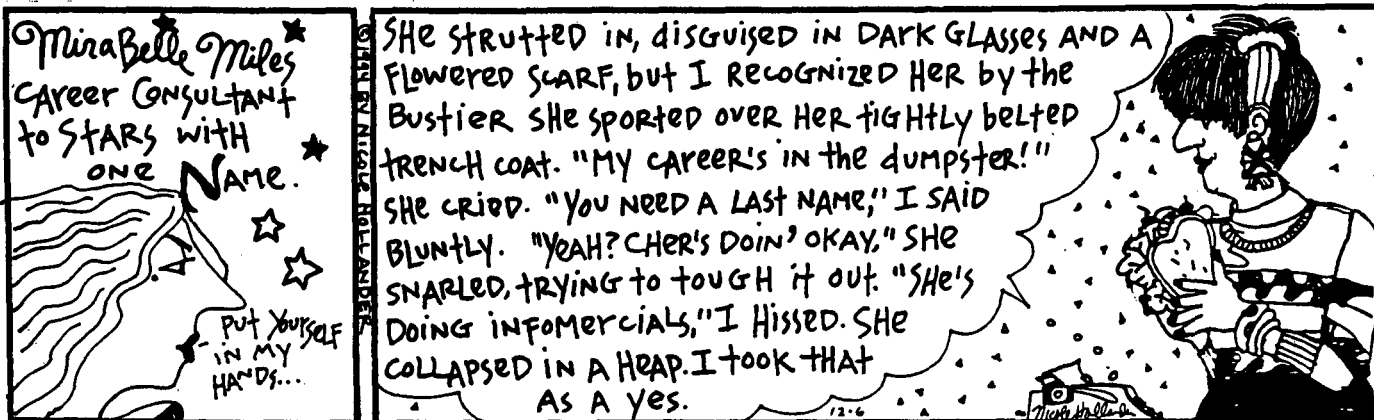
Giving all due credit to the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, this article nevertheless implies that all of us striving to build a national movement to retake our federal government are out of touch. On the contrary, any sober analysis of the current state of our country has to conclude that those who shut their eyes to the big picture are blind.

Accepting the federal government's continuing failure to provide adequate funding to social programs means accepting current priorities that put half of discretionary spending into the military with its promise of continued domestic decline and threat of foreign adventurism. It accepts the premises which blame the government for the failure of the private sector to keep our communities from disintegrating.

Yes, people in the community must define the strategy for community

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





development, but they had better have a perspective that goes beyond neighborhood boundaries. That perspective should include the recognition that we are all part of a nation that is taking our tax dollars and spending them in our name for our own destruction. We can stop it, but not by closing our eyes to what's going on in Washington.

Bernice R. Bild
Coalition for New Priorities
Chicago

Baddest company

Robert Parry's excellent story ("Bad Company," Dec. 12) did not go far enough in indicting the mainstream news media for their role in the Reagan administration's propaganda war in support of the death squads in El Salvador, genocide in Guatemala, and the Contras in Nicaragua. The networks let themselves be led by the nose by the CIA spin masters. I worked for ABC during the '80s and, unhappy with the network's coverage in Central America, took a leave of absence. With a camera in tow, I traveled to Nicaragua to freelance stories about the Contra war. It proved very hard to sell the major networks stories about how the Contras were attacking cooperatives, health clinics, and schools in Nicaragua. As Parry notes, such reporting cost Paul Allen his job at National Public Radio.

In May 1985, I received \$500 from ABC for footage of war refugees rebuilding communities away from the

fighting in northern Nicaragua. John McWethy, ABC's Pentagon correspondent, slanted the story to support President Reagan's assertion that the Sandinistas were interning their own citizens in concentration camps. About the same time, ABC offered me \$3,000 for footage of a pro-Contra town that had been scorched by Sandinista army troops for harboring Contras who had killed dozens of civilians working in the region. As a foot soldier in the propaganda war, I quickly got the message about what kind of material network producers wanted.

Mainstream reporters used to hang out in the bars in Managua with their CIA buddies sneering at the "Sandalista" crowd of alternative journalists—among them *ITT*'s Bill Gasperini—who refused "to toe the White House line." Bill didn't get his leads from U.S. embassy press releases, and his stories consistently told *ITT* readers what was really going on.

Peter White
Rohnert Park, Calif.

Socialist softball

I believe Kevin J. Kelley lobbed a few softballs for Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) ("Socialist survivor," Nov. 30) While Kelley depicts Sanders as voting for gun control and thus opening himself to attacks from the NRA, Kelley glosses over the larger issue of Sanders voting against the Bill of Rights and for the expansion of the prison-industrial complex. Omitting the assault-

rifle ban (a bone thrown to liberals), Sanders abandoned the class he professes to represent with his vote for the odious crime bill.

Sanders also voted for Clinton's tax package, with its measly \$16 billion dollars for the cities. His vote for that measure's taxes on Social Security benefits brings him closer to the New Democrat position than to a socialist one.

Although Sanders managed to be reelected, his margin was rather narrow. *ITT* failed to look at the possible connection between the aforementioned votes and the narrowing of Sanders' margin of victory. Could voters have been dissatisfied because they felt that Bernie abandoned his principles on those important votes?

Alexander Cockburn, in *The Nation*, has honed onto these contradictions. I would advise *ITT* not to gloss over this and hold Sanders accountable. It is extremely important for the left to define and articulate socialism to a public indoctrinated by years and years of capitalist propaganda.

Chris Waldron
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Wrong number

I wrote you recently (Letters, Dec. 26) and regret to inform you that the unemployment numbers given in the first paragraph of my letter are false. The false interpretation is my responsibility, based in part on a deep depression caused by the recent election results and in part on my half-assed ability to read Polish. I apologize for the error.

My views as stated in the letter have not changed, but I have no real choice but to accept the 16.2 percent figure now offered by the government here.

I'm sorry for the error. I am suitably ashamed and humbled.

Stephen Hibbard
Mszana Dolna, Poland

InSHORT



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ZAPATISTAS RISE AS PESO FALLS

Late last month, the Zapatista rebels learned that their greatest trump card may not be the oratory skills of Subcomandante Marcos or the deftness of their makeshift peasant army, but the skittish impulses of international investors still uncertain about a Mexican economy that is far more troubled than its corporate boosters are willing to admit.

On December 19, just two days after the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) briefly took over more than 30 towns in the southern state of Chiapas, the fragile Mexican economy nearly collapsed.

Once news spread that hundreds of ski-masked *campesinos* taking orders from the Zapatistas had blocked all of the state's main roadways and paraded through mountain towns holding their rifles high, the financial community, domestic and international, promptly began to move their pesos out of the



The shootist, I

Forget Newt and his orphanages: there are simpler ways to deal with problem citizens. Newly elected Stevens County (Washington) Commissioner J.D.



"Andy" Anderson recently said local officials responsible for the

mentally ill, chemically dependent and developmentally disabled "ought to just take them out and shoot them," according to the Calville, Wash., *Statesman-Examiner*. Although Anderson has apologized for his comments, he insists it was "irresponsible" of Stevens County Commissioner Allan Mack to have informed the media of his remarks.

The shootist, II

In what seems a particularly ill-timed attempt at irony, the American Shooting Sports Council, Inc. has awarded recent shooting target Bill



Clinton the Firearm Industry's 1994 Strategic Marketing Award.

The council says Clinton's support last year for gun-control legislation spurred anxious Americans to stock up on unprecedented

amounts of firearms, making 1994 a record-setting year for gun sales. "President Clinton will go down in history as the president who armed more Americans in peacetime than any president did during a time of war," explains Richard J. Feldman, the council's associate executive director.

The shootist, III

David Keen, head of the company behind the proposed plan to market hyper-powerful "Rhino" bullets to the masses, has offered a unique aesthetic



argument for ammo overkill. "The beauty behind it is that it makes an incredible

wound," Keen says of the bullets, which are designed to fragment into deadly shrapnel upon hitting their targets.

Devilish

Evangelist Morris Cerullo first gained notoriety after telling supporters that every check sent to him could rescue loved ones from Hell. Now Cerullo claims to need several million dollars, quick—to res-



cue his computer records from the forces of Evil. "[O]ne of our employees was deceived

by the devil and destroyed precious partner records and programs," the London *Independent* reports the evangelist as saying.

APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Models Inc.—redible!
2. Infomercial Irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-iclous
6. Raoul Cédras-tic
7. Ollie North nasty
8. Molliday in Rwanda
9. Zhirinovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

country. Over the next four days, the peso lost 31 percent of its value in trading against the dollar. Interest rates spiked and the international investment community—the backbone of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's "Mexican Miracle"—cried "foul" as millions of dollars in Mexican assets and bonds lost one-third of their value overnight.

For the 5,000 Zapatistas, encircled in the Lacandon jungle by more than 40,000 soldiers, the economic chaos at work in Mexico City was a terrific victory. The "silent mobilizations," as Marcos called the actions in Chiapas, demonstrated that the rebels' ability to hold the country's economy hostage may prove to be their greatest bargaining chip after all.

Ironically, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León had held the political upper-hand over the Zapatistas ever since his largely uncontested electoral victory on August 21. Zedillo's solid win seemed to demonstrate to Mexicans that the Zapatistas would have to give up sooner or later. A carefully orchestrated media blitz featuring Zedillo calling for "peace" and "dialogue" had erased some of the rebels' early glamour while portraying Marcos as intransigent.

On the political front, the president took advantage of a deepening split within the center-left Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) by convincing the party's conservative wing, led by party president Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, to join a government negotiating team, headed by Government Secretary Esteban Moctezuma, in talks with the rebels. But now the Zapatistas may not need the PRD's support. The rebels' strength may come instead from Zedillo's eagerness to resolve the crisis and remove the potential for yet another debilitating economic scare—or worse, a spreading of Zapatista fever to other parts of the country.

The Zapatistas say they will negotiate only through Bishop Samuel Ruiz, a longtime supporter of the indigenous cause, and a separate commission comprised of Chiapas intellectuals and activists. Although negotiations haven't been scheduled, Zedillo, just a few days after the peso crash, announced that the government negotiating team is willing to work with Ruiz's National Intermediary Commission.

In Chiapas, the situation remains tense. Radicalized by the Zapatista movement, *campesino* groups throughout the state have seized the giant estates of absentee owners. Responding with force, the wealthy landowners have fielded private armies to evict the *campesinos* and their families. The ensuing collision has led to the death of two to three *campesinos* every day, says Pablo Romo of the Fray Baralome de las Casas Human Rights Center in Chiapas.

However, with their newfound strength the Zapatistas appear ready, once again, for the long haul. "The EZLN took up arms against the government, so the government can't be a mediator of this conflict," wrote Marcos to Zedillo the morning of the mobilizations. "We are not looking for more government 'commissions,' but a profound transformation of the political, social and economic relations between the government and the governed."

—Leon Lazaroff

BAD CHEMISTRY

Before the 50 workers at OxyChem's plant in Belle, W.Va., voted to join the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) in May 1993, it had been 23 years since any unit of the giant parent company,

Occidental Corp., had successfully unionized.

Despite the OCAW victory, however, OxyChem remained deeply committed to its anti-union strategy. And so, when the company shut down its profitable Belle plant in December—after giving employees just two months' notice—the OCAW argued that the closing was a heavy-handed attempt to block workers from exercising their rights to organize and to agitate for better environmental and worker safety standards.

Local union chairman Terry Short says that OxyChem managers had never mentioned financial problems during 20 months of contract talks. Just prior to the plant-closing announcement, the Belle facility had been running at full capacity, and in September the company spent \$750,000 in maintenance on the plant. But in early October, after state regulators slapped OxyChem with several environmental citations, the company announced it would close the plant on December 6, taking an \$18 million loss.

Soon after the closing, a federal judge in Charleston, W.Va., temporarily restrained OxyChem from dismantling the plant, pending a ruling in a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearing later this month. The NLRB has already charged OxyChem with dozens of labor law violations, ranging from threatening workers that it would close the plant if they unionized to actually closing it in retaliation against their union activity.

With OCAW support, OxyChem's workers had begun calling attention to environmental and public safety hazards at the plant, which makes four highly toxic chloromethane chemicals. As a result of their complaints, the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection cited the Belle plant for 34 major pollution offenses.

After announcing the closing, OxyChem had promised clean-up work to its employees. But none were retained after the plant shut down—even though non-union contractors were still doing decontamination work at the site. "We'd prefer they open the plant, give us our jobs and try to work with the various environmental agencies to correct problems," says Short. "But if they're not willing to do that, then pay the state the \$60 million in [environmental] fines they owe."

If the NLRB complaints are upheld, the company could be required to reopen the plant. But the chilling effects of the company's actions cannot easily be reversed. OCAW was involved in a promising organizing drive at a 600-worker Du Pont plant near the OxyChem facility, but that has ground to a halt. "This scared people to death," Short says. "[The Du Pont workers] said they're not going to risk it."

Nevertheless, the OxyChem workers remain solidly behind their union. "The company broke environmental and labor laws," Short argues. "There's always a degree of regret in losing jobs, but no one feels the union is responsible. All our people realize who is at fault."

—David Moberg

JUSTICE DEPT. STEERS CLEAR OF CINCINNATI GAY-RIGHTS CASE

Signs of the Clinton administration's rightward drift are on display in Cincinnati, where the U.S. Department of Justice is declining to intervene in a federal court case testing the constitutionality of anti-gay rights ballot initiatives.

Later this year, the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals will decide whether a

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Tuning out

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently issued a notice that it plans to strip away most regulations governing TV ownership. The FCC seems to have a touching belief in the corporate responsibility of the communications companies it is supposed to be regulating. At present, companies are limited to owning 12 stations (and no more than one per market) and to reaching no more than 25 percent of all homes with TV's. Proposed FCC rules would abolish the ownership limit, raise the permitted percentage of the national audience to 50 percent and allow multiple holdings in the same market.

TV networks, the first potential beneficiaries, are jubilant. They argue that cable companies with multichannel offerings have an unfair advantage, one that needs to be offset by allowing them more regulatory leeway in order to increase their "efficiency." Public interest advocates are aghast at the possibility that corporate consolidation will further marginalize small owners and make minority ownership virtually impossible. "Efficiency" has also, over the last 15 years of deregulation, been a pass-word to cheap and vulgar programming, bringing us shock jocks and prurient talk shows. In turn, conservatives have pushed for content controls, such as indecency rules, on the economically liberated broadcasters. And so structural deregulation has opened a back door for content reregulation—and to serious First Amendment headaches.

It's official

TV Marti, the multimillion-dollar U.S. television service to Cuba that has been jammed since its inception, has long been accused of purveying propaganda, charges its advocates have always strenuously denied. Now its own lawyers—attempting to fend off a long-running legal challenge to the service—admit that Marti is a propaganda outlet, and should be judged as such. Government lawyers argue that Congress did not create Marti as “an academic exercise in disinterested journalism,” and so journalistic decisions “must ultimately be made by appropriate American government officials in light of TV Marti’s guiding statutory mission to further the ‘foreign policy of the United States.’”

And by the way...

The Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by R.J. Reynolds to dismiss a lawsuit against it for Joe Camel ads, because they tempt children to smoke. ... In the spirit of open government, perhaps the Republican-led House of Representatives could be persuaded to honor C-SPAN’s request to permit its cameras to point at the (often empty) chambers of the House, while members read their speeches into the *Congressional Record*. After all, Gingrich may not want the Dems to repeat his tactic of garnering wide audiences at home while speaking to an empty gallery.

municipal judge ruled correctly last August when he overturned Issue 3, a 1993 referendum approved by Cincinnati voters that would prohibit the inclusion of homosexuals in any city law offering equal protection or equal opportunity to minority groups. In the fall, the Justice Department announced that it would not involve itself in the case unless it could be demonstrated that [Issue 3] impacts on a federal program or statute.” That statement seems bizarre since the judge who overturned Issue 3 in August said the measure violates “rights protected under the Constitution.”

As in several other cities and the state of Colorado, the radical Christian right won support for the anti-gay rights measure by arguing that equal-rights laws grant homosexuals “special rights.” Issue 3 backers also drew the support of several African-American clergy members by claiming that homosexuals were seeking to elevate themselves to the same minority status as blacks. Despite the fact that no city or state in the United States offers affirmative action on the basis of sexual orientation, referendum supporters warned that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals might dilute job prospects for other minorities.


For Cincinnati’s gay community, the Issue 3 case is just one battle in a two-front assault on gay and lesbian rights. On January 9, Cincinnati’s Pink Pyramid gay bookstore will be tried in a municipal court on charges of obscenity for offering a video of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Salò: 120 Days of Sodom*. Although local prosecutors lost their 1990 obscenity case against the city’s Contemporary Arts Center, which had displayed controversial photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, that hasn’t stopped them from targeting *Salò*, which is arguably less offensive than the Mapplethorpe photos in that it shows no sexual penetration. The 1975 film, which contains scenes of repulsive cruelty, depicts the behavior of prominent citizens and officials in a town in fascist Italy. (See *In These Times*, “Etc.,” August 22, 1994.)

Though most legal observers expect the city to lose its case, Cincinnati prosecutors may score an indirect victory by bankrupting the Pink Pyramid—which has been saddled with expensive legal bills—and scaring off others from offering controversial art in the city.

—Scott MacLarty

ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid



You'll never appreciate how good you have it now, until you experience

VITRIOL REALITY

- ★ Headset shows "Full House" reruns w/deafening commercials!
- ★ High-tech flatulence recycling!
- ★ CD player that skips replaces the outmoded record player!
- ★ Instant-Karma stun-gun zaps you when you shoot at others!
- ★ Simulated Cyber-impotence twice as frustrating as real thing!
- ★ Cyber-sneakers constrict to pinch any size foot!



©TOM MCGOVERN

THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

The honorable Gus Reichbach

Gus Reichbach wears a suit and tie. Mousy brown Gene Wilder curls adorn his head, and grey-blue eyes amplify his nasal Brooklyn accent with a twinkle.

On Gus Reichbach's feet are battered cowboy boots. On his desk—next to the cowboy-booted feet—are dozens of empty Schweppes cans, an old rotary-dial telephone, tapes of "The Fugs" and a hammer. A cartoon hangs on the office wall: it is Reichbach being sworn into office by a judge. Abbie Hoffman is floating overhead, along with the words, "The Brooklyn Revolution has begun." At the bottom is the somewhat unlikely motif, "Up against the wall, Your Honor."

Gus Reichbach, aged 48, is a judge. And if anyone embodies Newt Gingrich's apocalyptic vision of a McGovernik counterculture come to power,

ETC.

By Shawn Neidorf

Political science

When science is at odds with politics, don't expect science to prevail. That seems to be the lesson for a team of California researchers who found that needle-exchange programs for drug users can curtail the spread of HIV without increasing drug use.

In a massive study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the California team—led by Dr. Peter Lurie—concluded that Congress should lift its ban on federal funding for needle-exchange programs. (See *ITT*, Aug. 8.) But a CDC review of that study is being suppressed, apparently because it supports the study's conclusions—which are unlikely to be popular with the new Congress.

Lurie's study was submitted to the CDC in September 1993, and was publicly released that October. The CDC's parent agency, the Public Health Service (PHS), then requested that the CDC review the study's methodology, findings and conclusions. According to Lurie, the review was completed and sent to the PHS director's office in December 1993, where it has been kept under wraps ever since.

The release of that review would be significant, Lurie contends, because it would be the first document in which a government health agency publicly endorsed needle-exchange programs to prevent AIDS.

Some government spokespeople are downplaying PHS' failure to release the review, however, calling it an internal document not intended for an outside audience. But Dr. T. Stephen Jones, who oversaw

the study for the CDC and was also involved in its review, said he was under the impression that it would be made public. Although Jones would not confirm that the review was completed a year ago, he admitted that it has been "done for quite a while." Jones would not discuss the contents of the review, but he praised the researchers' "hard work" and called the study "a wonderful effort."

To Lurie, the failure to release the report—for whatever reason—is inexcusable. "The federal government is playing politics with the lives of drug users, their sex partners and their children," he said. "Delay, delay, delay, delay—people are dying."

Indeed they are. One-fourth of all adult AIDS cases reported to the CDC through June 1994 resulted from the sharing of needles. Sharing needles or having sex with someone who did accounted for nearly three-quarters of all cases in women.

Meanwhile, research in favor of needle exchange keeps mounting. A recent study in New York City showed that needle-exchange programs there cut the HIV-infection rate among exchange clients by at least 50 percent. That study prompted the *Chicago Tribune* to call on Congress to lift the ban on needle-exchange funding.

But the problem isn't a lack of supportive research, it's a lack of political will. Law-makers who know the research usually do nothing, fearing they'll look soft on drugs. And those who would rather punish addicts than save their lives simply ignore the evidence altogether.

it is Reichbach. The judge first entered the limelight during the student occupation of Columbia University in April 1968. He was one of the street theater Pageant Players who roamed the Manhattan campus wearing hard hats and fancy costumes, snarling and growling, beating drums and chanting: "Work! Study! Get ahead! Kill! ... Work! Study! Kill! Prosper!"

Reichbach was the first student to be called before a disciplinary hearing following the protests. When the meeting started, six hundred demonstrators stormed the hall and convened a People's Tribunal. A few weeks later the university tried again: This time, law student Gus Reichbach was put on permanent disciplinary probation.

Because of his differences with Columbia, Reichbach's admission to the bar was delayed several years. Eventually, however, the doors creaked open and Reichbach became a lawyer. He worked with the New York Law Commune and acted as Abbie Hoffman's lawyer when publishers and booksellers balked at marketing his famous tome, *Steal This Book*. He went on an activists' trip to China in 1973, rooming with the late Jerry Rubin, and he was involved in a convoluted scheme to meet with Algerian diplomats in Paris in an attempt to gain political asylum in North Africa for LSD-apostle Timothy Leary. In 1974-75 he spent time as a farm laborer in California before resuming his radical legal work.

Four years ago, in a bizarre sequence of events, Reichbach was elected a judge in Kings County, Brooklyn. (He had run a token campaign to help a friend beat a Democratic Party machine candidate but ended up claiming victory himself by 15,000 votes.) He entered his courtroom bereft of robes, in the belief that defendants are "scared shitless enough" without seeing the arbiter of their destiny sitting up high with black robes flowing off a stern back. He hastily began his assault on the status quo.

Within weeks, the self-proclaimed "first Yippie judge" had introduced a condom-distribution program to prostitutes brought before the bench. Doctors handed out the prophylactics along with words of advice on how the hookers could protect themselves from contracting HIV. In no time at all, Kings County court officials transferred Reichbach out of criminal court and into the small-claims world of civil court, where less chaos could be generated by his unorthodox methods.

Now, if he is lucky, Reichbach gets to preside over cases of little old ladies facing eviction from their apartments because their teenage grandsons have been dealing drugs from the building. Despite the public clamor for tougher and tougher penalties on drug dealers and all near them, and a widespread reluctance among the judiciary to defy this mood, Reichbach has utilized what he feels is "a calmer view." "I'm not eager to penalize what I consider to be a truly innocent grandmother who can't control her grandson," he states slowly.

If he is unlucky, he spends his days settling run-of-the-mill disputes between cantankerous neighbors. Since this is New York, there are many such cases to keep Judge Reichbach occupied.

The Yippie judge says he has only a handful of radical colleagues on the New York bench, a sprinkling of others in California, and a few more scattered in between. This is the counterculture in power, inhaling their dope fumes from decades past and stealthily undermining the powers of the land. It is a powerful lobby and Gus Reichbach knows it.

With a slight chuckle and a mischievous smile, the nasal voice assesses the prospects for victory: "We're a bit behind schedule." He pauses for theatrical effect. "But I'm optimistic."

—Sasha Abramsky



Poor logic

N

ine months ago, sociologist Charles Murray made a startling admission. Writing in the spring 1994 issue of *Public Interest*, Murray retracted his claim that federal welfare policy has been a key culprit in the rising number of America's out-of-wedlock births—a central tenet of his enormously influential 1984 book, *Losing Ground*. "It seems likely," Murray conceded, "that welfare will be found to cause some portion of illegitimacy, but not a lot."

Although Murray's retraction undermines a central belief of both Republican and Democratic welfare reformers—that government handouts are feeding an illegitimacy crisis—it has received virtually no notice in the press. Even today, as Congress prepares to radically revise the nation's welfare system,

that flawed assumption—and dozens of equally wrongheaded notions—are driving the debate in Washington.

In order to unravel the myths of the congressional debate, one must examine the complex trends being cited—including illegitimacy rates, welfare payments and child poverty rates. By tracking those statistics over the last 50 years one can learn what is really wrong with welfare, and what can be done to fix it.

In Washington today, welfare reformers from both parties are arguing that overly generous welfare benefits are responsible for the current welfare crisis. In fact, the value of the average benefit for recipients of Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has declined nearly 50 percent over the last two decades. In inflation-adjusted dollars that's a loss of roughly \$400 per family per month.

Not surprisingly, that drop in income has been accompanied by sharply rising poverty rates. Though these figures suggest that what welfare recipients need are more benefits, not less, both parties are considering reforms that would substantially cut govern-

ment assistance for poor people. And the GOP's Personal Responsibility Act, which is now dominating the terms of the welfare debate in Congress, is downright draconian.

Unfortunately for unwed teenage mothers, they are the primary target of Republican reformers. "The federal government has made it possible through welfare for unwed women to have babies without having to suffer," says Steve Boriss, press secretary for Rep. James M. Talent (R-MO), a key GOP crafter of the Personal Responsibility Act. "These women do not have to have kids."

Under the Republican plan, unwed mothers under the age of 18—and their offspring—would be permanently barred from almost all government assistance. They could only qualify for welfare by marrying the child's father, or by finding another male figure to adopt the child.

The GOP plan would require all other welfare recipients to work after two years. The Republicans say they will pay for any needed workfare programs by cutting off benefits for *legal* immigrants. As Boriss explains, "our plan provides uncomfortable living, survival living."

President Clinton, who has shifted rightward in several policy areas since the election, has put off announcing his final welfare reform proposal until after meeting with the nation's governors later this month. Right now, Senate Democrats are looking at "less punitive alternatives" to GOP plans, says Kathy Sylvester of the Progressive Policy Institute, a think tank closely associated with the Democratic Leadership Council. She argues that the general outlines of the Clinton plan differ sharply from Republican

The welfare debate in Congress is driven by skewed statistics.

By Mike Males

proposals. According to Sylvester, the administration emphasizes education and job training rather than denying benefits.

Still, most Democrats and Republicans share the core belief that welfare provokes and rewards illegitimacy—especially among teens—and that lowering or eliminating benefits is an essential tool to enforce reform. But that assumption—as Murray was forced to admit—is just plain wrong.

Across the nation today, the states with the highest welfare payments to poor families have the lowest rates of unwed births, especially among teenagers. Conversely, the states with the lowest welfare payments have the highest rates of illegitimacy.

Historically, it has proved extraordinarily difficult to link supposedly generous welfare payments to illegitimacy.

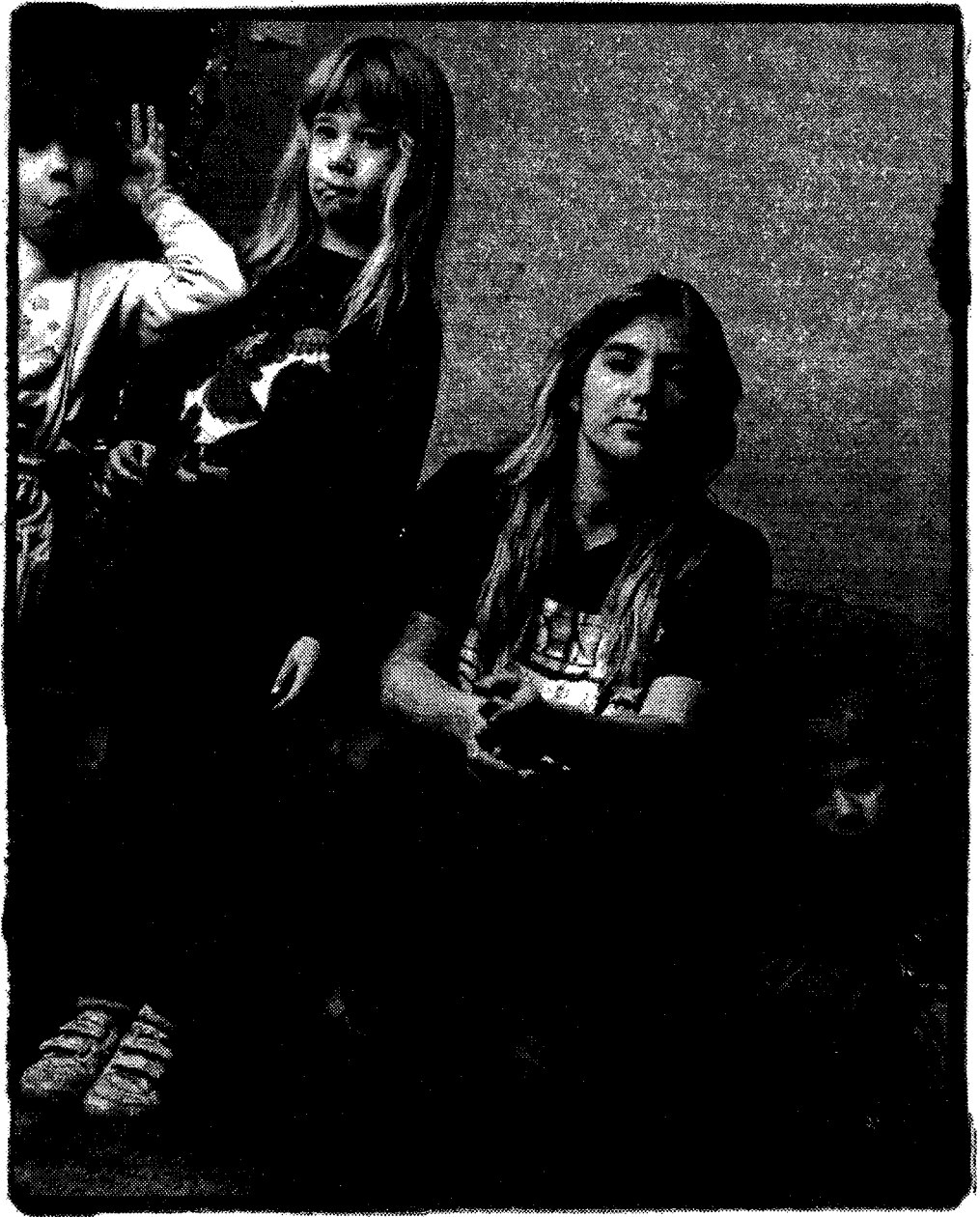
•The real value (adjusted for inflation) of poor-family welfare benefits increased slowly from 1940 to 1960, rose rapidly from 1960 to 1970 during the War on Poverty, leveled off in the Nixon years and then decreased rapidly from 1975 to 1993.

•From 1940 to 1990, unwed birthrates rose steadily, sharply and identically (sixfold) among both teenage mothers and adult mothers. But it's important to note that unwed birthrates increased at roughly the same rates during the '40s and '50s—the “family values” decades—as they did during the counterculture '60s. The most marked increase in unwed birthrates took place after 1975—when the value of welfare benefits began falling sharply.

•The percentage of children living below federal poverty guidelines stood at over 30 percent during the '40s and '50s, plummeted to 14 percent by 1973, then rocketed upward to 23 percent by 1993. Contrary to what congressional reformers imply, there is no relationship between unwed mothers having babies and higher levels of child

poverty, simultaneously or delayed, over the past 30 years.

It is clear, however, that female children who grow up in poverty are more likely to become teenage mothers. Over the last three decades, the rate of poverty among children almost perfectly correlates with the birthrates



among teenage mothers a decade later. That is, child poverty seems to lead to teenage childbearing, not the other way around.

In fact, until the mid-'70s poorer teenage and young parents were “early on, early off” welfare clients who collected benefits briefly in transition from school to the job market. Long-term studies found teen mothers, even if unwed and poor at time of birth, were overwhelmingly likely to be married, employed, off welfare and earning

incomes well above poverty levels within five years. The increasing aid for young families that characterized '60s and early '70s War on Poverty programs provided the boost for millions of families to escape welfare.

But today's shrunken public aid no longer provides a boost out of poverty, only a marginal subsistence that cements long-term dependence. Any "reform" Congress produces is likely only to deepen the cuts that quietly added 5 million children and adolescents to poverty rolls since 1973.

Today, government officials are more likely to blame victims than to seek the true causes for their condition. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala takes aim at the misbehavior of unwed teen mothers while remaining silent on their backgrounds of poverty and socially imposed racial obstacles. Three-quarters of unwed teen mothers on welfare are black, Latina or other non-white, and 85 percent were poor or near-poor before giving birth, a 1994 study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute found. But Shalala simply declares that unwed teen mothers who drop out of school are eight times more likely to be on welfare than mothers who are married, over 20 and high school graduates, period—without emphasizing the social or economic context.

"Teenage" has become a Democratic euphemism for "non-white" and "low income." Thus, Democrats tacitly accede to Murray's *Bell Curve* wisdom, which claims that blacks (in particular) are inherently more disposed to illegitimacy and poverty. This acceptance of Murraysque assumptions leaves them unable to mount arguments against his absolutist, punishment-oriented cures.

President Clinton's proposal that unwed teen mother's should simply return home is a classic New Democrat sham. A June 1994 study released by the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington shows that only a small minority (perhaps 14,000 out of 350,000) of teen mothers under age 18 live on their own. The study, noting that many of them had faced sexual or physical abuse at home, had "valid reasons" for leaving. Consistent research has found that large majorities of teenage mothers, both white and non-white, were the victims of physical and sexual abuse while growing up—mostly inflicted by adult male family members averaging well over 21 years old.

Contrary to New Democratic biology popularized by Shalala, school-age girls do not "become pregnant" all by themselves or "contemplate motherhood" in monastic solitude. More than half the so-called "sexually active" girls under age 15 reported having been raped by "substantially older" men, the two-year Guttmacher study found.

California's near-complete records of 40,000 births among school-age girls in 1993 show that 71 percent were fathered by adult men averaging over 22 years of age, not by schoolboy peers. The age gaps between 3,000 California junior-high mothers and the adult men who fathered

their babies averaged 6.5 years in 1993. National figures are similar.

Poverty, rape, sexual abuse, family violence, much-older adult "partners," racial disadvantage: these are matters that New Democratic "values" and "character" crusaders do not address. The administration's ongoing "national mobilization against teen pregnancy" included a "Democratic family values" campaign featuring shamings of pregnant girls and excessive victim-blaming rhetoric. The effect was to shift the welfare debate further to the right, allowing Republicans to offer more drastic schemes and making their harsh rhetoric sound almost reasonable.

In this atmosphere, one confronts the following conventional wisdom on the adult male impregnation of school-age girls: "That is a serious problem, we agree," says GOP Rep. Talent's press secretary Boriss. "But if the man isn't a fit father, the girl has to make a decision not to get pregnant."

Like the assumptions that underlie teen-mom bashing, the mathematics of welfare reform are little short of lunacy. The "budget-busting" welfare programs targeted by both parties—AFDC, food stamps, nutrition programs and housing subsidies—account for less than 4 percent of the total federal spending. Another target that has recently come on the table is Supplemental Security Income, a program that delivers roughly \$25 billion per year to the disabled and elderly poor.

By contrast, over \$1 trillion in government subsidies, special tax breaks and other benefits flowed to thousands of corporations and 180 million individuals in 1993, according to federal budget figures. A bipartisan commission led by Sens. Bob Kerrey (D-NE) and William Danforth (R-MO) was supposed to find ways to reduce those outlays, but the commission concluded its work last month after failing to agree on a single cut. Congress finds it far easier to focus its attention on the benefits of the nation's politically powerless.

As former Nixon Commerce Secretary Peter Peterson exhaustively detailed in his 1993 book *Facing Up*, it is the exploding benefits for non-poor adults that are the true cause of the nation's erupting deficit and entitlement crisis. "In 1991, about half of all federal entitlements went to households with incomes over \$30,000," Peterson wrote. Unlike Europe, whose social insurance programs serve as income "equalizers," U.S. welfare "has nothing to do with economic equality."

The elderly receive three times more in local, state, and federal benefits than do children, even when schooling is added. Yet welfare to the old is so maldistributed—\$75 billion in Social Security goes to seniors whose cash incomes exceed \$50,000 per year—that the United States *still* has by far the highest elder (and child) poverty rates of any industrial nation. Scheduled Social Security cost-of-living increases for just the next year will cost more than the entire combined budgets for Head Start and school lunch programs. (Remember that AFDC and food stamp recipi-

ents that are *not* indexed for inflation.)

Other examples of invisible welfare abound. The U.S. government forgoes \$46 billion per year in tax revenues for homeowner mortgage interest tax deductions—80 percent of which goes to wealthy homeowners. Every year the federal government gives an average of \$10,000 to each non-poor farmer. Tens of billions of dollars in subsidies also go to railroads, shippers, banks, nuclear utilities, public lands grazers, mining companies and other interests. Tax subsidies to real estate interests that promoted '80s overbuilding and '90s demands for more breaks.

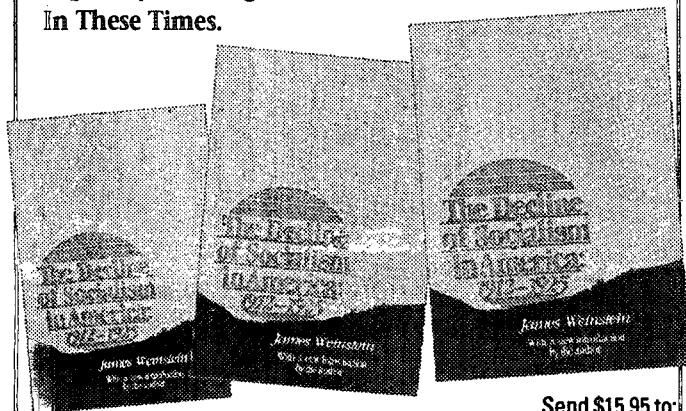
The Progressive Policy Institute has listed \$225 billion in annual corporate subsidies that could be redirected to ameliorating poverty and income disparities. But Democrats are not championing such reforms at either an individual or a corporate level.

Given the inability of lawmakers to honestly confront these facts, it is likely that any welfare reform that does make it through Congress will produce a consensus like that forged on the crime bill: emphasizing punitive measures while throttling social spending. As a result, teenage mothers and their babies, like tens of thousands of now-homeless veterans and mentally ill before them, are at risk of being cut off completely, with few choices except life on the street and survival in a grim shadow economy. ▲

Mike Males is a writer and doctoral student in social ecology at the University of California, Irvine.

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Note: As of January, 1995, more than 400 non-governmental organizations in 72 countries, comprising more than 15 million individual members had joined the Global Ratification and Elections Network, to work for ratification and implementation of the Constitution for the Federation of Earth.



Mother courage

A

*A former teen
mom tells of
life on the
welfare rolls.*

By Ariel Gore
OAKLAND, CALIF.

young woman with a sticky baby in a stroller stands ahead of me in line at the check-cashing place on Broadway. It is the ninth of the month so the wait to pick up our food stamps is short. Her turn comes and she pushes the stroller to the counter. She slips her state ID card under the bullet-proof glass and watches the woman who picks it up.

"Sixty-four," the woman says, and passes a pink card to the young mother to sign.

"I'm supposed to get a hundred, not sixty-four," she snaps.

"I don't know, I just give out the food stamps," the woman behind the glass says meekly.

I'm sure the flurry of profanities that escape from the young mother's mouth can be heard from the street. By the time she quiets, the woman behind the glass is holding the food

stamps to her chest. "I'm not going to give them to you," she says matter-of-factly.

The mother suddenly assumes a diplomatic tone. "I'm sorry," she says. "I know it's not your fault. Can I please have my food stamps so my baby can eat?"

The woman behind the counter gives in to the plea, but as soon as the mother wraps her pale fingers around the small pile of bills and pulls them safely away from the glass, she starts in again.

I sign for my own food stamps quickly, and rush out into the brisk morning. As the glass door shuts behind me I can hear the mother screaming. "You think I'm going to kiss your ass..."

The mood in the food stamp line this month is more strained than usual. By now everyone has heard something of Washington's plans for "welfare reform," and we know the complaints aren't with the welfare system itself, but with us.

Even I, who have never made any secret about being on welfare and never apologized for procreating before my 20th birthday, have begun glancing over my shoulder when I am in line at the grocery store waiting to pay with brightly colored government coupons. At the bank, I now hesitate before taking my AFDC check out of the county envelope it arrived in and placing it on the counter in front of a manicured teller. And from long talks and brief encounters with other women on government aid, I know I am not alone.

At our most panicked we envision a social worker hammering on the door and hauling our children off to an orphanage. On calmer days we simply try to make ends meet, acutely aware that the climate has shifted, that our families have been judged, and that the verdict is guilty.

The "welfare debate" has been going on for a long time, longer than the four years I have been on the rolls. The politicians' wranglings always revolve around how severely to cut our checks this year. The personal attacks I have encountered in my day-to-day life range from grocery baggers' snide comments to a neighbor who pounded on the glass panes of my front door periodically, demanding to know "whose responsibility is it to raise your damn kid anyway?"

Young motherhood quickly taught me never to question that child rearing was a mother's responsibility alone, and to be eternally grateful for whatever help I received to keep my baby from starving. When I got pregnant at 18, I could have had an abortion. I had the political and personal freedom to terminate the pregnancy. I had a choice. And I decided to have a baby. Like studying English instead of medicine, I knew motherhood was a bad economic decision. I didn't calculate my finances—there weren't any. So just as I was toting up the resources I could gather to pay for col-

lege, I also had to think about how I would take care of my child: there was marriage, private charities, or AFDC. Mercifully, I had the support to get out of an abusive relationship shortly after my daughter was born, so wedding plans—shotgun or otherwise—were out of the question. Private charities proved to be helpful but underfunded at best, paternalistic and underfunded at worst.

So when my daughter was six months old and I was about to start college, I got on the welfare rolls. I used what I still consider to be sound logic, but in the afternoon it took to fill out the welfare forms I had become a part of what conventional wisdom now refers to as a “social pathology.” I might add that although I have received significantly more government assistance to pay skyrocketing university tuition than to feed my baby, I have never been pathologized for pursuing an education I couldn’t afford.

Now the powers that be, from Newt Gingrich to Bill Clinton, are calling for an intensification of stigmas against teenage pregnancy, and out-of-wedlock births. Erstwhile political opponents have come together to declare open season on any mom who dares procreate without a husband and a stable income. Linking teen motherhood to gun violence “and other social pathologies” lends urgency to their arguments. As Jonathan Alter put it in a December column in *Newsweek*, “every threat to the fabric of this country—from poverty to crime to homelessness—is connected to out-of-wedlock teen pregnancy.”

I realize that I might be called a radical when I suggest that these stigmas should really be applied to lawmakers who cut welfare benefits without serious plans to end poverty. I might even be crossing the line when I suggest that they should be branded on batterers whose violence is responsible for displacing 50 percent of the homeless women and children in this country. The vast majority of young mothers I have come into contact with over the years are good mothers. But disrespect, shame and schemes to cut off the few available resources a woman has do not bolster good parenting. These assaults merely drain our spirits and shorten our fuses. And we all know that after food, clothing and shelter, what a mother needs most is patience and spirit.

When I tell people how I wound up on the welfare rolls, my story is often met with nods of understanding and a reminder that I am an exception, that I am different from

other teen parents. For a time I believed the assertion that somewhere out there lived the stereotypical teen moms who had children for money and did not deserve the few hundred dollars a month they received from the state. But the more young mothers I meet in the welfare office, in college classrooms and in high school continuation programs, the more I find there is a world of exceptions, a world of human beings each with their own stories of understandable life choices.

Because I have been somewhat outspoken in my belief that young women have the same right to parent as older adults, a lot of folks, including one local TV reporter and several radio-show hosts, have asked whether I am not encouraging teen pregnancy. Had any of them given me more than 30 seconds to respond I would have told them what I tell pregnant teens who ask for my advice: Countless women and men have fought for our reproductive freedom. Countless women and men have fought for our right not to have to marry, whether we choose to remain single because of violence or simple lack of chemistry (assuming, of course, that dad left a forwarding address). But *you* will have to fight for your own right to parent. Family, neighbors and society at large will make it extremely difficult for you. But if, given all that you know about this country, you choose to take on parenting before “conventional wisdom” says you may, I have faith that you can succeed.

You are not wrong. You have not sinned. You have burned no bridges, though you may have to pay a heavier toll to cross over again. Your nights will be sleepless and your days filled with dia-

per changing and impossible budgeting, but you are not alone. Afford your children all the respect few will afford you.

It is possible that life had discouraged the red-haired woman at the check-cashing place long before she became a mother, or maybe her mood this morning had more to do with sleep deprivation than with Newt Gingrich. I don’t know. But I am willing to bet my welfare check what she needs isn’t shame and stigma. The \$36 worth of food stamps in question isn’t likely to do the trick either, but they might feed her family through Christmas, and that will be something. ◀

Ariel Gore publishes the new parenting ‘zine *Hip Mama* from her Oakland, Calif., apartment.



OF PETER HANNAN

welfare

Beyond tough love

F

or more than 15 years Laura Matthews has been working with welfare mothers. Matthews—working first for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and later for the state's Department of Public Aid—has witnessed the effects of the system from a ring-side seat. And she is more convinced than Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-GA) that it has supplied a knock-out punch to the African-American family.

Most of her clients live in some of Chicago's poorest communities, those surrounding the infamous Robert Taylor Homes. Unlike many of her colleagues, Matthews is not intimidated by the neighborhoods she must visit; she spent much of her childhood in similar neighborhoods. But much has changed since her youth.

"Since folks started smoking cocaine, things have got-

ten progressively worse in the communities I work," Matthews says. "And I'm not talking about crack here. This started before crack came to Chicago. People started 'freebasing' cocaine in the late '70s and early '80s, and that's when I began to see women doing things they never would have done in the past."

Matthews sees cocaine addiction as the most likely cause of the recent (and much-reported) cases of abandoned children. She believes the problem can be remedied by devoting more attention to drug rehabilitation programs. Women, she says, tend to respond much more positively to such programs than do men.

Men, in fact, are nearly irrelevant for many of her clients. "Some men are amazing in that they do whatever they can to make life better for their women and children. But even those men tend to get beat down," she laments. "There is literally nothing for men to do, except make a name for themselves as dealers or players or some other kind of outlaw."

The lure of the underground economy is hard to resist when there are no alternatives, says the 43-year-old Matthews, who currently is working toward a master's degree in social work. "I've seen jobs disappear. One day there's a store, the next day it vanishes into thin air. No one wants to make business investments in areas where the chances of being stuck-up are damn near certain."

Matthews feels pulled between the "tough love" approach currently popular—which leans heavily on punitive approaches such as workfare and two-year cutoffs—and a more comprehensive strategy to improve the communities in general. She disagrees firmly with those who urge a "cold turkey" withdrawal of welfare, but she understands their frustrations.

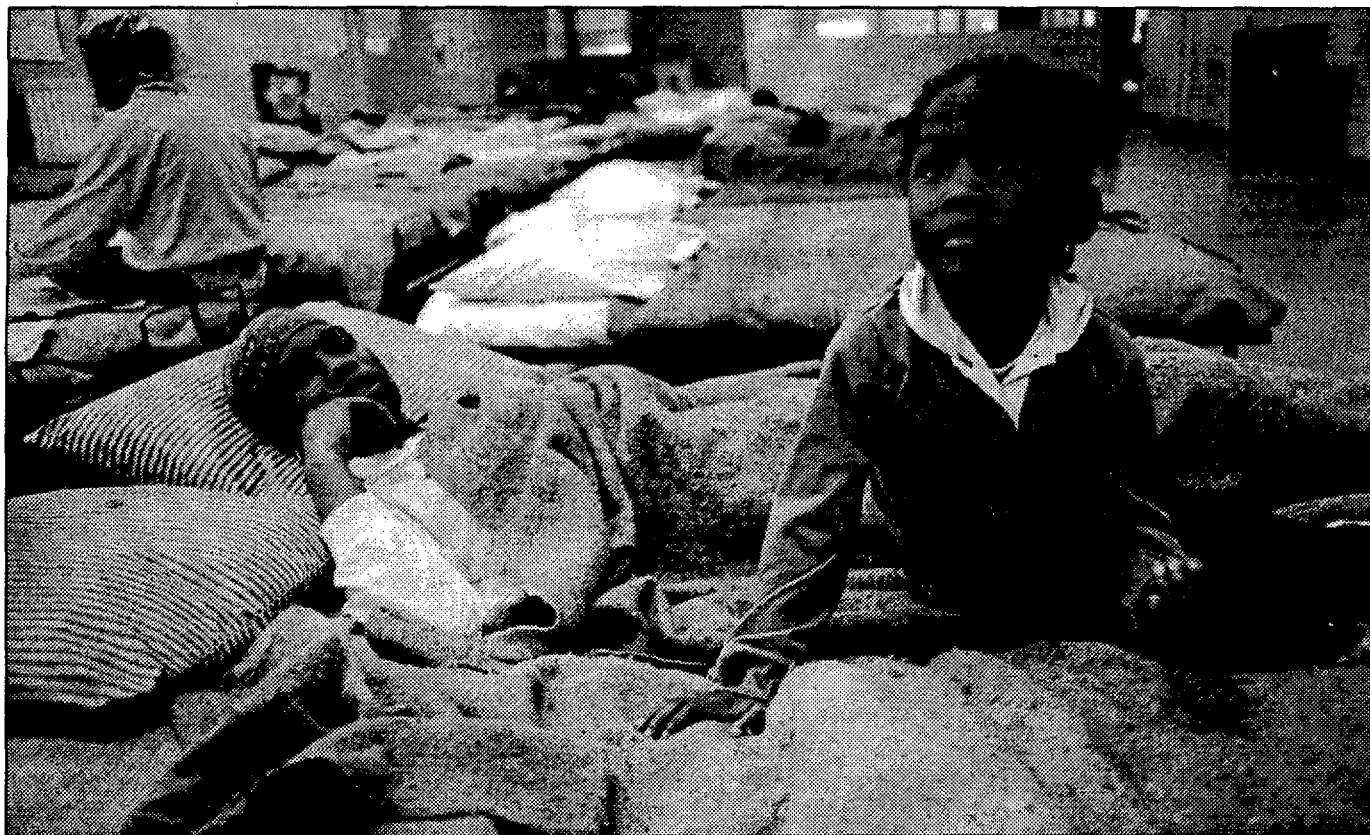
"It's a reasonable question to ask: why should I support someone who just wants to sit on their ass and watch soap operas all day long?" Matthews comments. "Now, I'm not saying that most welfare mothers do that. But I am saying that some, too many, do behave in that way. And the real question is: why not act like that if it pays?"

The Gingrichian argument that welfare is dangerous because it encourages dependency is one that has widespread support. Some of the most withering condemnations of welfare have come from black radical organizations. Most of the groups spawned during the Black Power phase of the civil rights movement derided welfare for forcing men out of the home and for engendering what was widely termed a "welfare mentality."

Ministers in the Nation of Islam often peppered their lectures with lengthy anti-welfare diatribes, arguing that the white man had created welfare to keep black people totally dependent on the whims and caprices of their once and future slavemasters. And so welfare recipients had been

*Few are
unaware of
the problems
of the welfare
system.
Solutions,
though, are
harder to find.*

By Salim Muwakkil
CHICAGO



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demonized by some black groups well before former President Ronald Reagan gave voice to the "welfare queen" stereotype. Even before raging Republicans seized the Congress last November, black leaders had been demanding a change in welfare as we know it.

Matthews says most of her clients do whatever they can to get out of the system, but are often stuck. "If they get a job, they need babysitters, medical care and other services that they can't afford." In this state, the maximum amount of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments is \$662 for the average public aid family, made up of a mother with two children. The federal poverty level, she points out, is \$991 a month. "There are more than 1.4 million public aid recipients in Illinois," Matthews notes. "This is a large increase over previous years and represents 12 per cent of the state's population, the highest ever."

Karen Miller is one of Matthews' clients. Currently pregnant with a second child, Miller has a 4-year-old daughter, whose father is serving time in prison for armed robbery. The 21-year-old black woman has never worked in her life but, thanks to Matthews, she is interviewing for a word processing job next week. The job, at Chicago-based Montgomery Ward, features an extensive training period in which Miller will be provided with marketable skills.

Matthews has found employment for several of her clients through this particular program and others like it. She says employers have found that training former welfare recipients is a good investment, and that their trainees turn out to be good employees. But most of those jobs pay so lit-

tle, the women find it difficult to move to neighborhoods more conducive to stable family life. Consequently, the cycle is seldom interrupted for long. Some of the women fall back into the dependency groove, and many children of working mothers tend to repeat the cycle.

"In some ways I applaud the kind of radical approach offered by Newt Gingrich and the Republicans," Matthews says. "I figure we need a major shake-up and their strategy may be just what we need. But then I think about the millions of people who will be hurt, and I come to my senses."

Even now, welfare recipients are falling even deeper into poverty. In Illinois, the buying power of the public aid recipient's dollar is 52 percent less than it was in 1970 and an increasing number of families are spending more than 80 per cent of their cash grants on housing. Homelessness among families is on the rise. And poverty among children is reaching epidemic proportions: Fully one-half of AFDC recipient are children—and one-half of them are 6-years-old or younger.

Poverty has its most indelible effects on young children. Matthews has followed the progress of many youths, from birth to the teen years, and marvels at the power of the status quo. "Unless there is some serious change in the way people invest their money in this society, we are headed for a very messy fall," she predicts. "Without jobs, there is no real substitute for welfare except jails. And most of my children's fathers are in jails. It's a cycle that has to be broken—but I just don't think we should break it over the heads of the recipients." ◀

G OVERNMENT

Draining the pool

*Reaganomics
bankrupted
one of
America's most
prosperous
cities.*

By Stephen C. Smith

T

he scope of Orange County's fiscal flop is vast and deep. One hundred eighty-seven public agencies lost a total of \$2 billion in the Orange County Investment Pool. But unless you live there, you'll probably never hear about the smaller scandals. Many culprits have so far escaped public scrutiny; they may go forever unknown because their names never appear in headlines or on a ballot.

This article is about one such scandal. Progressives will delight in this tale of how the prudent policies of a liberal ex-mayor were dismantled by Reaganauts, who accused him of being business-hostile, only to

run the city into the ground themselves a few years later.

Located in the heart of Orange County, Irvine is America's largest master-planned city. With a population today of over 120,000, Irvine was one of the fastest-growing cities in California during the '80s.

Much of Irvine's growth occurred while Larry Agran was a City Council member and later mayor. Agran was a political anomaly in Orange County politics. A progressive liberal, he defied the odds and won election time and again to the Irvine City Council. He introduced programs that enhanced Irvine's quality of life. Irvine implemented one of California's first curb-side recycling programs. Its ordinance seeking to eliminate the use of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) by Irvine businesses won the city a United Nations award for environmental achievement. And he negotiated a vast open space preservation ordinance with the city's monopoly landowner, the Irvine Co.

But Agran was also fiscally responsible, supporting modest tax and fee increases on the business community to maintain services. Agran teamed up with moderate Republican City Council member Cameron Cosgrove to enact a set of guiding principles and standards known as the City Council Financial Policies. One important

policy was the creation of an Economic Uncertainty Reserve. This account set aside 5 percent of the General Fund (the operating budget) as a contingency fund in case of financial hardship or disaster.

While Agran was in office, Irvine's economy prospered. Between 1985 and 1990, construction activity in Irvine averaged almost \$400 million per year. The city budget set aside the requisite 5 percent of its operating budget for economic uncertainties, and there was talk of raising it to 10 percent. Irvine's bond rating was the highest of any city its size in California.

In June 1990, Agran and Cosgrove were ousted from office by a conservative coalition led by Sally Anne Sheridan. Sheridan and running mate Barry Hammond applied a litmus test to the supposedly non-partisan campaign, insisting that only true conservatives should run a city in the heart of Orange County. Liberals, after all, are tax-and-spend fanatics who know nothing about fiscal responsibility.

As Sheridan and Hammond took office, the Reagan/Bush spending binges of the '80s caught up with the U.S. economy, and the nation plunged into recession. Irvine, which had always depended heavily on new growth for revenue, was hit hard. To buy time, the new

City Council drained the Agran/Cosgrove Economic Uncertainty Reserve to balance the budget. Although the City Council formally adopted budgets with a 5 percent safety margin, year after year they dipped into the Reserve when actual revenue fell short of projections.

Sheridan left office in 1992, replaced by fellow conservative Michael Ward, but Hammond remained. They insisted on remolding Irvine into a "business friendly" city, backing a drastic cut in Irvine's annual business

license fee. The fee had a \$50 base, and on top of that charged \$3 per employee to ensure that large companies paid a fee commensurate with their impact on city services.

Ward and Hammond would have none of that. Joined by newly elected conservative Christina Shea, they wiped out the \$3 per employee fee, leaving only a flat charge of \$50 regardless of business size. This meant that Fluor Daniel Inc., with 3,000 employees, paid the same fee as

Land of bilk and money

The bankruptcy of Orange County, Calif., has now moved well into its second phase, with severe spending cutbacks and financial "workouts" directed by Salomon Brothers, the County's new Wall Street advisers. Disbelief still lingers. There is a sense that such news should properly be coming from New York or Detroit. Orange County is widely viewed as a "relentlessly frugal place" that "prided itself on sturdy, conservative values," as Josh Getlin put it in a recent *Los Angeles Times* special supplement on the debacle.

But Orange County is also a place of grand illusions, not all of which originate at Disneyland. It has long been a hot-house of high-rolling speculative ventures and scam operations. And though the primary engine of the county's formidable economic growth over the past 30 years has been public spending through the Pentagon, Orange County is renowned for its anti-government fervor. Ironically, it is precisely the combination of speculative finance and antagonism to government that has brought the county to its knees.

"Cote de Fraud" is the name *Forbes* gave to Orange County back in 1987, in recognition of its ascendancy as the nerve center of the country's "boiler-room" scam businesses. Government investigators had by then identified at least 100 fraudulent businesses in the county, which managed to sell over \$1 billion worth of phony investments ranging from precious metals to artichoke farms. Bogus real estate operations are another county mainstay. Just last spring, the Securities and Exchange Commission uncovered what *Business Week* reports "may have been the largest real estate pyramid ever in a region rife with investor scams," through which one William Cooper and partners bilked investors out of as much as \$124 million.

More than their illegality per se, the speculative excesses of such practices provide the basis for understanding Orange County today. The leveraging schemes on which Treasurer Robert Citron bet the county's well-being are perfectly legal in the current environment. The basic premise behind Citron's strategy was simple. It was as if Citron took out a home equity loan to purchase a stock whose value he was convinced would rise. The deal is a winner as long as the stock does rise, but a loser when the stock falls. Citron was convinced that he could gamble with the county's finances by Michael Stamenson, a high-flying municipal bond trader at Merrill Lynch. A decade ago, Stamenson had sold the city of San Jose on similar leveraging strategies, by which the city subsequently lost \$60 million.

How can such practices continue? Since the early '80s, Congress has been discarding financial regulations that were written in the '30s but are no longer appropriate. But it does not follow that, if some regulations are outmoded, all regulations are bad. Too many policy-makers have nevertheless embraced such disastrous reasoning, though less from force of logic than weight of campaign contributions.

The malign influence of Proposition 13 is also crucial. Orange County is wealthy, the richest among the 15 largest counties in the United States. But because of limits on local taxation imposed by Proposition 13, and the decline in real estate values in the '90s, revenues from county property taxes fell from \$272 million to \$218 million between 1990 and 1993. At the same time, income from Citron's and Stamenson's portfolio shufflings more than quadrupled over the same years. By 1993, the county was actually drawing more revenue from financial speculation than from property taxes.

Thus, the county that grew rich from government spending now refuses to finance its own public sector adequately through taxation. Its residents instead serve up free-market nostrums: that productive effort and honest competition reign in private business while ineptitude and venality prevail in the public sphere. At the very least, the experience of fiscal meltdown should raise doubts even among Orange County's true believers about such politically fashionable but literally bankrupting ideas.

—Robert Pollin and Marc Schaberg

the self-employed small business person. In the first year alone, city staff estimated, this proposal cost Irvine \$556,000 in revenues.

Irvine bled red ink. Between 1991 and 1994, construction activity in Irvine dropped to about one-third of what it was during the last half of the '80s. The city was forced to eliminate 22 percent of its full-time staff positions.

The requirement for a 5 percent budget reserve became the City Council's nemesis. The Council could no longer sustain the reserve without raising taxes—an act no Republican could relish in the aftermath of George Bush's broken "Read my lips, no new taxes" promise. But they couldn't eliminate it, because to do so would expose them to justifiable charges of fiscally irresponsibility.

So in May 1993, with no end to the recession in sight, city officials made a deal with the devil. Disregarding the prudent Agran/Cosgrove policies, the City Council created a "Revenue Enhancement Fund." This obscure account was opened not to pay for street improvements, or a new park, or even sewer lines. It was created to bankroll a swim in the Orange County Investment Pool (OCIP).

Irvine issued \$60 million of general obligation taxable notes, due and payable in one year. It invested the money in the OCIP, which yielded a higher interest rate than the rate on the notes. The objective was to make a profit off the difference and transfer it to the operating budget. The Economic Uncertainty Reserve would continue to exist, although much of it would now be funded by these paper profits.

Under California law, general obligation bonds require a two-thirds voter approval. General obligation notes, however, require no voter approval. City officials used this loophole to issue a \$60 million debt without any review by the voters, and no doubt patted themselves on the back for their ingenuity.

It worked—the first time. Irvine made \$2 million off the scheme, and most of the money was transferred into the General Fund, satisfying the city's policy of maintaining a 5 percent reserve.

It worked so well that in July 1994 they did it again, dropping another \$62 million into the OCIP. But this time they were far more reckless. They disregarded a rule requiring a 1 percent spread between the note interest rate and the OCIP interest rate, on the technical grounds that the 1 percent rule applied to a fixed rate, while the new note had a variable rate. City Manager Paul Brady and Finance Director Jeff Niven estimated that only a 0.5 percent profit could be guaranteed—even though there was no guarantee at all the OCIP rate would remain higher than the note rate. Even worse, a general obligation debt is secured by law with revenue from the General Fund—the fund that pays for virtually every daily service provided by the city. Confident that the scheme would work again, Irvine gambled \$62 million for the chance to gain only \$300,000 in profit.

Michael Ward, Barry Hammond and token Democrat Paula Werner voted to approve the scheme. (Christina Shea had the good sense to abandon her allies and oppose it, along with newcomer Greg Smith.) But unfortunately Irvine's luck ran out.

The OCIP was declared bankrupt on December 6, 1994, and its assets were frozen. If Irvine can't get any of the money back by July 1995, it will have to repay \$62 million plus \$3 million interest to the noteholders—all of it out of the General Fund. This is more than the entire fiscal year's worth of General Fund revenue. At the very least, the loss will be the \$3 million interest plus whatever the city can't recover from the OCIP's liquidation—which according to recent media reports may be 27 percent, or about \$17 million.

As of this writing, the media is focusing on county government. But in Irvine, the foxes are still in the henhouse. It remains to be seen whether Brady, Niven, Ward, Hammond and the rest will ever be held accountable for their misdeeds. But then this is all too typical of Orange County Republicans.

Hey, they even forgave Richard Nixon.

Stephen C. Smith is a public policy consultant. He was a budget analyst for the City of Irvine from 1985 to 1988. You can send comments by E-Mail to scsmith@igc.apc.org.

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MILITARY CONVERSION

A good offense

There is nothing outwardly grim about HR Textron Corp.'s eucalyptus and pine-shaded office and factory complex. The surrounding industrial park in this suburb north of Los Angeles looks like a prosperous redoubt of 21st-century technological optimism. Yet times have been grim for the people who work inside.

Some of the best ideas about defense conversion are coming from labor.

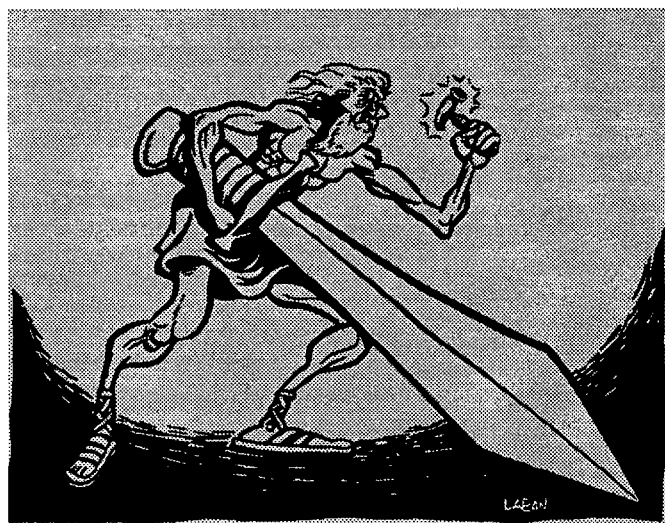
By David Moberg
VALENCIA, CALIF.

From 1990 to 1993, the company—a division of Textron, which makes electro-mechanical controls and other products for major military contractors—lost a third of its

business and nearly half of its workforce, shrinking to 350 employees. With its defense work disappearing, HR Textron's survival was at stake, and so was the fate of dozens of smaller supplier firms to which it was linked.

Company managers thought that four products, including some valves and high-tech composite materials, could sell well in civilian markets. And they were particularly hopeful that those products could be sold to Calstart, a two-year-old consortium that has been trying to develop electric vehicles to meet California's new auto emissions standards. (See *In These Times*, December 26.) But Calstart, considered a key vehicle for defense firms hoping to convert to civilian work, has been slow to develop. And HR Textron simply could not wait for the consortium to succeed.

So early last year, with the encouragement and cooperation of its union, the International Association of Machinists District 725, HR Textron became the lead firm in a new model of defense industry conversion known as the Regional Advanced Manufacturing Project, or RAMP. In contrast to Calstart's conversion model, which aims to create new markets for the technology of defense firms, RAMP concentrates on changing work rela-



© TERRY LABAN

This is the second story in a special three-part series on defense conversion. The first story focused on military contractors that are attempting to retool for civilian work despite the lack of government funds for such efforts. This article explores the novel strategies developed by unions—which have a substantial share of their members in the defense industry—to transform America's military-industrial complex. The final story will assess the impact of military base closings on surrounding communities. This series was made possible by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

tionships within networks of military contractors so they can better exploit new and existing civilian markets.

"We stand the Calstart model on its head," argues HR Textron vice president Rod Hanks, who helped design RAMP along with the Machinists. With the government providing little funding for conversion efforts, RAMP is one union-backed strategy that tries to make the best of a bad situation. The RAMP strategy is designed to transform not just a single defense firm but an entire network of interrelated small- to medium-sized military contractors that want to move to commercial markets.

From shop floor to boardroom, RAMP is starting to transform the work practices and business culture of Textron and 30 other companies, most of them already part of a web of interrelated suppliers. At its heart is a vision of what the Machinists call the "high performance work organization." It is a model of workplace cooperation between labor and management that goes beyond conventional management-initiated teams and quality circles. In the Machinist model, the union gains influence over management's strategic decisions, which they use to benefit both workers and the company.

Under RAMP, "the union supplies validation and a feedback loop you don't get in a non-union shop," argues Mark Wiesel, manager of HR Textron's conversion plans. "Validation means workers know it's not just management trying to get more work for less pay or to fire people." And, Wiesel acknowledges, because unionized workers feel more secure in critiquing the company, "management also gets more realistic feedback."

The initial results of the RAMP program, which began in early 1994, have been striking. In RAMP's first three months, productivity at HR Textron jumped nearly 17 percent. It used to take the company 200 days to complete production of an order; now it takes eight days. A solenoid with 150 parts was redesigned to require only six. With its new efficiency, HR Textron landed new non-military contracts, and by year's end 44 jobs had either been retained or created as a result of the initial program.

Chief union steward Ed Spafford is still wary of middle managers who don't seem to have accepted the growth of worker power, but he thinks conditions in the plant are the best they've been in his two decades at HR Textron. "You can solve problems faster," he says. "I have a little more power now. I can talk, and they listen. Instead of beating management on the head, we can sit down and talk reality."

The strategy is well suited for the defense industry. One of the major barriers to conversion from military to civilian products is the hierarchical, rule-bound and inefficient military procurement culture that has shaped managers, engineers and production workers alike. Instead of meeting marketplace demands, defense contractors worked to meet government specifications that stressed unique performance requirements and ignored cost.

Unions have a big stake in successful conversion. The defense industry is one of the most heavily unionized sectors

of manufacturing and a redoubt of decent-paying, highly skilled jobs. As Rutgers economist Ann Markusen argued in a 1994 study published by the Economic Policy Institute, it was the growth of defense manufacturing in the '80s that partly compensated for—and concealed—the simultaneous decline in civilian manufacturing. If defense firms choose to simply downsize—instead of converting to civilian manufacturing—the labor movement will lose as the nation's manufacturing capacity declines.

There is, however, no completely coherent labor strategy on defense conversion. Unions are tempted to fight for the jobs of defense workers by protecting their military contracts. Like defense plant managers, local union leaders fear that demonstrating too much interest in conversion might lead the Pentagon to divert dwindling orders to other plants. (At labor's urging, language was inserted in the 1995 defense budget that, in theory, commits the military not to punish plants whose workers support conversion.)

Given the concern about jobs, union reactions are sometimes schizophrenic. For example, officials within the United Auto Workers (UAW), especially New England regional director Phil Wheeler, have been leading advocates of federal government conversion aid. But the UAW has also lobbied hard to continue or expand production of the V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft, the M1-A1 tank upgrade and the C-17 and C-130 cargo aircraft—all systems that, according to military spending critics such as the Center for Defense Information, should be killed.

After World War II and during the Vietnam War, UAW president Walter Reuther advanced bold plans for military conversion, but the labor movement was divided. Because of union support for Cold War foreign policy, and because union members cherished the well-paid defense jobs, the AFL-CIO rarely criticized defense spending.

Yet for much of the past two decades, some unions—especially the Machinists—have supported federal legislation calling for the creation of worker-management committees that would plan alternative uses for defense plants. Former Sen. George McGovern (D-SD) first advanced such legislation in the early '60s. Similar bills were later championed unsuccessfully by the late Rep. Ted Weiss (D-NY). They might have finally received a serious hearing in the late '80s if House Speaker Jim Wright, a convert to military conversion, had not been driven from office.

Alternative-use planning remains a mainstay of most labor and peace group conversion strategies, despite congressional inaction. Indeed, Congress in 1994 even refused to appropriate modest sums—totaling about \$15 million—to help communities and businesses with planning and feasibility studies for conversion of military industries or bases.

Labor and conversion groups, however, did win a \$50 million appropriation in the fiscal year defense budget that should eventually provide \$2 billion in loan guarantees for the conversion of small- and medium-sized defense firms. They also won longer advanced notice of contract termination for workers in defense industries and pledges that job

creation would become a criteria for Technology Reinvestment Project (TRP) grants. TRP funds development of technologies that have both civilian and military uses. Under the new legislation, unions as well as business can now apply.

Without the force of government mandates or the lure of federal financing, companies have resisted advanced planning for conversion. They have focused instead on keeping defense business, rather than undertaking the hard work of changing how and what they produce. Reflecting the deep-seated hostility toward unions among American executives, businesses seem to resist especially hard when unions propose conversion.

For example, the Machinist local at a large Army depot in Tooele, Utah, had hired a business consultant and planned to aggressively seek businesses to take over a large, new truck rebuilding facility that was scheduled to close. But union president Jeffrey St. Clair was forced to abandon the plan, concluding that businesses were scared off by the union's active efforts to save the factory. Similarly, the International Union of Electrical Workers local at General Electric's defense plant in Lynn, Mass., has tried—in vain—to convince management to explore alternative uses for that large but declining facility.

In St. Paul, Minn., an overwhelmingly female Electrical Workers local began alternative-use planning for the defense and government systems division of Unisys Corp. in 1989. They proposed 12 new products, then organized shareholder support for alternative-use planning. Early this year Unisys adopted its own conversion policy, planning products that were similar to what the union proposed. But the company did not credit the union, offered no role for labor in developing the plan, and has given no indication whether the new products will be built in Minnesota, where 7,000 Unisys jobs have been eliminated since 1986.

Some other union initiatives seem more hopeful. At both the Bath Iron Works in Maine and the Bremerton Shipyards in Washington state, union leaders are working with management to find alternatives to Navy work. Together, managers and union leaders have traveled to Japan, Scotland, Scandinavia, Russia and other countries to learn new techniques and get ideas for civilian products, from hydrofoils to ferries.

Bath Iron Works local union president John Dionne is also convinced that a new union contract has given workers more power on the job, increased shipyard efficiency and has given the union a role in shaping the yard's future. "Now all decisions about new work, overhaul work or work out of the country are made jointly by the union and the company," he says. "We're working with less supervisors. The guys know how to build ships. We've been doing it over 100 years. Now, we can use our knowledge."

In Connecticut, UAW Local 405 successfully worked with Chandler Evans, a defense subcontractor, to develop two different pumps that could have commercial as well as military sales, potentially saving hundreds of union jobs.

In San Jose, former Machinist Mike Patrick leads Upsize,

a coalition of conversion advocates and unionists that is trying to persuade Westinghouse, Lockheed and FMC, which have been "downsizing," to use their technology—such as electric drive trains designed for tanks—as the basis for con-

Because the defense industry is one of the most heavily unionized sectors of the economy and a redoubt of decent-paying jobs, unions have a big stake in conversion.

verting to electric bus production. FMC has agreed to build three pilot electric buses for the San Jose airport and is willing to sell the drive-train technology, but it has resisted full-scale bus production. Even local Machinist leaders are not yet enthusiastic supporters of conversion.

Management style is the crucial factor in the few labor-initiated conversion success stories. Where managers are open to sharing power and want to find new strategies to survive after defense work declines, unions can and often do play a creative role. But many unionists don't even try, in part because they believe managers are uninterested in their ideas and are unwilling to grant workers more power.

The weak role of the federal government in promoting conversion—which has expanded only slightly under Bill Clinton—has greatly limited options even for those unions that want to push for conversion. Unions have limited influence without mandates or financial support for alternative use planning and without major new public investment, for example, in mass transit, railroads, or alternative energy technologies.

In the face of this inaction, the Machinists have taken the lead in promoting a strategy that emphasizes two main objectives—creating new industries (the Calstart model) and transforming businesses into "high performance work organizations" (the RAMP model). The latter resembles what is fashionably described in business circles as "re-engineering" but with a big difference: the union plan is based on giving workers more power. "We came to the conclusion that we needed to concentrate on creating new markets to create new industry," says Lou Kiefer, who directs Machinist conversion work nationally. "That was the only way to do conversion, as economic development, not conversion." In the absence of new government spending, Kiefer argues, new industries will only be created if businesses are forced to respond to new environmental regulations. "The only way to create new industries is to fuel new markets through environmental regulations. You can't do conversion without

environmental regulations. It's the only new industry that has a shot."

Calstart, for which the Machinists still retain hope, is a prime example of an industry consortium responding to environmental regulation initiatives. Environmental regulations could also encourage high-speed trains, which have been promoted by Machinists in both Los Angeles and Seattle. In the latter city, Boeing workers are discussing formation of an alliance with a Spanish train manufacturer, Talgo.

New industries created in response to environmental regulation, however, may not employ engineers and production workers at their former defense plants. Saving such defense companies or facilities may not always be the best conversion strategy. Michael Klosson, director of the Center for Defense Conversion, an independent research and advocacy institution in Mountain View, Calif., sees Calstart and RAMP as important steps in "decoupling conversion from keeping workers on the same site at a defense facility."

RAMP attempts to make an entire network of firms more flexible and adaptable to civilian markets. Ken Dozier, a former small business executive who now teaches at California State University, worked with the Machinists to lead that effort. Contrary to popular mythology, Dozier argues that small companies are often neither flexible nor innovative. Change is risky for their owners and managers, who often lack a global perspective and are obsessed with control. One of the biggest problems for American industry, he argues, is centralized executive control. In an information-age economy, he contends, businesses must become part of interdependent networks—American versions of the Japanese *keiretsu*—and decision-making must be dispersed.

"We're building a culture here, an information-age capitalism," Dozier argues. "I'm a capitalist. It's a good game, but it could be better. I believe money should flow to the good ideas." Now bosses don't have incentives to find the best ideas but to defend turf and tasks. Above all, that has meant trying to control workers, "making people do wrong things perfectly," Dozier says, rather than encouraging innovation and initiative.

Dozier hopes that RAMP will create a common language and approach to design, production and marketing among bigger companies and their network of smaller suppliers. Dozier believes unions should play an important role in this process. They can deal with large public policy issues—the Machinists, for example, have largely been responsible for obtaining roughly \$3 million in federal and state funds that RAMP has received so far—in a way that small businesses can't and don't. The union can also help with retraining workers. "An organized workforce retrain faster than unorganized workforces," Dozier argues.

At Air Transport Manufacturing, a small unionized shop that has made metal enclosures for military electronic equipment, president Kirn Kessen believes that his firm has already gained from being part of RAMP. He's learned new ways of looking at business strategy, compared techniques with other small suppliers, and developed better ways to use

computers to plan. "I knew what I wanted to do, but I didn't know how to do it," he says. Then the union encouraged him to join RAMP.

Now Kessen is offering workers training in math, blueprint reading and basic problem-solving, hoping to make them more capable of independent judgment. But as he attempts to take on new commercial work (such as fabricating portable metal sales booths), he has found that he has also had to train workers to abandon the precision defense work required. To save money, for example, some welds are made when the metal is still dirty.

"It was very difficult for the employees at first," he says. "It was almost like untraining them: you don't have to check everything. That was hard." But it is also an indication of how the narrowly technical traditional job training may not be as fruitful as broader training in production strategies.

"You've got to get workers thinking about how to shape enterprises," argues Seymour Melman, professor emeritus of industrial engineering at Columbia University. Melman, a pioneer in conversion planning, believes that union strategies such as RAMP "make workers as a group more competent to undertake the organization of work." Yet unions will have to move beyond such reorganization and even alternative-use planning to organize and invest in employee-owned enterprises, he says. Unions might be able to establish investment trusts—which they have done in the housing industry—to invest in conversion projects. Some money could also come from union pension funds.

Unlike the Clinton administration, whose limited conversion program is obsessed with technology, the Machinists want to focus on developing new markets, transforming business culture to give workers more power and ultimately to create jobs. "Very few politicians seem concerned about addressing the problems of hundreds of thousands of people who have been laid off," says Don Nakamoto, research director of District 725 and a key conversion advocate. "There's all this discussion of technology. That's part of the problem of making conversion happen in this country. There's not an emphasis on putting people back to work. That's a big mistake." ▲

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FOREIGN POLICY

Curse of the zombie

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Will the United States try to bring Haiti's tyranny back from the dead?

By John Canham-Clyne

f all the half-measures and compromises emanating from the White House, none is more pathetic than its Haiti policy. Afraid to upset the bipartisan foreign policy consensus forged during the '80s, the White House refuses to acknowledge the true intentions of previous initiatives that used the smoke screen of "promoting democracy" to conceal cynical attempts to install regimes friendly to U.S. interests. And this duplicity continues to bear bitter fruit. The network of humanitarian and political organizations through which the United States intends to remake Haiti will in all likelihood serve only as vehicles to restore to power the same people and institutions that have mired Haitian society in poverty and oppression.

Until the intervention, the United States had a less than stellar record support-

ing "democracy" in Haiti. Following the 1986 ouster of U.S.-backed dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, the CIA created and funded the National Intelligence Service, ostensibly an anti-narcotics unit within the Haitian military, but in reality a political attack unit that carried out a brutal assault against Haiti's emerging democratic civil society.

At the same time, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which conduct overt political intervention under the guise of charity, development programs and assistance for "democracy," embarked on a multimillion-dollar "Democracy Development" program in Haiti, renamed "Democracy Enhancement" following Aristide's 1990 election. Funds to support various organizations of "civil society" flowed to so-called "moderates," who turned out not to be very moderate at all. Indeed, the first two stooge prime ministers following the coup against Aristide, Jean-Jacques Honorat and former World Bank official Marc Bazin, had received generous helpings of U.S. cash through these programs.

Bazin, in fact, was dubbed the Kandida Merekan (American candidate) during the 1990 elections.

Despite the dismal record, American officials insist that critics of U.S. policy should believe in American good intentions. National Security Council staffer Morton Halperin, an influential adviser on Haiti policy, says that the United States simply wants to allow Haitian democracy to develop on its own. Halperin, the one-time director of the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union and a critic of America's covert intelligence apparatus, praised Mark Schneider, head of AID's Caribbean operations, as someone whose democratic credentials could be trusted. Another AID official who spent six years at the mission in Haiti argued that AID's intentions had never been anything but honorable. He said that the agency had been "traumatized" by Honorat's flip from U.S.-funded "human rights" activist to frontman for the brutal coup. The official denied that the United States had tried to position its right-wing ex-clients as moderates, and blamed the Haitian left for refusing to have anything to do with AID. "The Haitian left won't deal with us, so the moderates stepped into the vacuum."

AID and NED democracy programs are the semi-overt successors to the CIA's "Elections Support Activity," which funded covert intervention in Chilean elections in the '60s and '70s. The current programs rely on a Byzantine maze of pseudo-private groups to funnel money into various countries, a system quite similar to the proprietary companies and charities run by the CIA. These "pro-democracy" programs resemble other AID operations—little of the money ever reaches anyone in Haiti, but they support a huge network of political hacks, scientists, agri-

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cultural specialists, doctors and computer firms who make money off AID contracts. AID administrator Brian Atwood recently said that 60 percent of AID dollars are spent in the United States.

There are two primary pots of money for direct political intervention in Haiti. AID has an ongoing Democracy Enhancement Project, the one that used to fund Bazin, with a five-year budget of \$15 million. A separate \$24 million funding stream, called the Elections Assistance Program, will in the next 18 months send \$20 million U.S. tax dollars and \$4 million from other donors for technical support to Haiti's election commission, and funding for political parties as well.

Even before the intervention, U.S. officials shifted the fundable center slightly to the left because old recipients like Bazin had discredited themselves through collaboration with the military. But the strategy remains the same: co-opt those elements of the popular movement willing to accept U.S. money and terms, and marginalize those who remain independent. In any case, the so-called nongovernmental organizations running the current effort resemble a rogues' gallery from past programs.

Americas Development Foundation (ADF)/PIRED: ADF was founded in 1980, and the Projet Integre pour le Renforcement de la Democratie en Haiti (PIRED) is its Haitian subsidiary. PIRE's director is anthropologist Ira Lowen-

thal, a self-proclaimed friend of the left who has been living in Haiti off and on since 1972. PIRE controls a \$15 million budget, although \$7 million of it was suspended under the sanctions.

PIRED organized a million-dollar "human rights fund" last April to bring together "responsible" elements of the popular movement with "moderate" Duvalierists, whose common bond was a commitment to renouncing violence. The program outraged the Haitian human rights community because U.S. forces were at that time returning fleeing Haitians without allowing them to apply for political asylum, and the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service were systematically lying about the human rights situation under Cédras. AID's Schneider said the fund was evidence that AID was "trying to get away from politics."

Yet the U.S. concept of a "responsible" left excludes anyone who would seriously challenge U.S. prerogatives. Lowenthal refused comment for the record, but one U.S. official named Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul and one-time Haitian Communist Party chief René Theodore as among Haiti's "responsible" leftists. Paul is a bona-fide

Members of Haiti's feared Tontons Macoutes mount an anti-Aristide demonstration in Port-au-Prince.

hero of Haiti's popular movement, a charismatic playwright, radio personality and democracy advocate who suffered brutal torture at the hands of the CIA-funded National Intelligence Service in 1988, and spent most of the past three years in hiding. But, like Aristide, Paul is playing a balancing game to placate the Americans, and although he has sharply criticized U.S. failure to disarm right-wing paramilitary forces, U.S. officials admit privately that they are grooming him for the presidency. Theodore's "Communists" actually advocate free trade and capitalist development, and are a marginal force in Haitian politics.

PIRED also formed PLANOP, the National Platform of Popular Organizations. PLANOP's members are supposedly associations of local popular organizations called "platforms," which receive funding from PIRE. They are concentrated in strategic neighborhoods that strongly support Aristide, like the Port-au-Prince districts of Cité Soleil, Carrefour-Feuilles and Delmas. Unfortunately, many in the popular movement don't know who, if anyone, actually belongs to these platforms. At the popular organizations' meeting with Aristide, a delegate from the Platform Martissant made an impassioned speech asking Aristide to bring Haiti's killers to justice. It's not clear whether Platform Martissant is one of the PIRE platforms, but a member of Konbit Komilfo, a very real organization excluded from the gathering, told the Haitian Information Bureau that "nobody knows who belongs to the Platform Martissant, not even people in the neighborhood of Martissant."

Behind the rhetoric of democracy, ADF's salary structure gives a more accurate picture of the agenda at work behind U.S. assistance. In fiscal year 1992, ADF spent \$300,000 on salary and benefits for three American staffers, while 15 Haitian staffers together received less than \$150,000.

Planning Assistance: Meanwhile, on the streets of Haiti's cities and towns, 25,000 to 50,000 Haitians toil for a dollar a day, shoveling and hauling garbage and fixing roads. The program began under Cédras as part of a "Local Governance Initiative" in the towns of Les Cayes and Gonaïves. It was explicitly designed to give management experience to and "reflect credit" on local government officials under the coup regime, at a time when most legitimate officials, such as the pro-Aristide mayor of Gonaïves, were in hiding. The program was run by a New York-based AID contractor called Planning Assistance, whose head, Joseph Coblentz, described two FRAPH members as his "most civic-minded" activists. The original initiative has mushroomed into a \$13 million jobs creation program, administered in part by Planning Assistance.

National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International

Republican Institute (IRI): Responsibility for funding political parties falls to the NDI and the IRI, two of the National Endowment for Democracy's "core grantees." The head of a popular organization with national legitimacy, who asked not to be identified, described three separate attempts to get him into the AID fold—a direct solicitation by Lowenthal at PIRE, a call from an acquaintance at the embassy and a visit by a team from NDI.

The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD): This AFL-CIO subsidiary is notorious for its collaboration with the CIA in covert operations. AIFLD may now be working to co-opt and neutralize labor militancy in Haiti through the Federation of Trade Union Workers (FOS), which was founded by AIFLD in 1982 with the blessing of dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier. AIFLD pays the organization's salaries, rent and utilities. At Aristide's first meeting with labor groups, a FOS representative spoke in support of the U.S.-backed free trade agenda, which would

probably close down many state enterprises. Meanwhile, outside, uninvited striking workers from the state flour mill demonstrated to try to get the Aristide government to reopen the mill.

Center For Democracy (CFD): The United States views Haiti's parliament as a necessary counterweight to Aristide's power, and the CFD, a non-profit contractor whose ostensible purpose is to study and promote democracy around the world, is working to bolster it. Aristide, a last-minute candidate for president in 1990, swept into office on the shoulders of a movement outside the purview of traditional political parties. As a result,

the parliament did not reflect the overwhelming progressive sentiment of the electorate, and Aristide struggled to get his agenda through. But the CFD is taking no chances. Last January, CFD head Allen Weinstein brought a group of right-wing parliamentarians headed by Robert Frantz Monde, a founding member of FRAPH, to Washington to promote a "compromise"—actually crafted by the State Department—between Aristide and the military.

The ascension of the right in Parliament is made more likely by the United States' sluggishness in disarming and defanging its old allies in Haiti's paramilitary forces. Many people in the democratic sector fear that parliamentary elections—for which no date had been set at press time—will be relatively peaceful in Port-au-Prince, but that right-wing gunmen will terrorize the countryside, where three-quarters of Haiti's population resides.

To be sure, the American occupation has opened up breathing room for Haiti's democratic and popular forces. Paramilitary groups and large landowners continue to intimidate and murder people in the countryside while the U.S. military looks the other way, but the all-encompassing terror of the Cédras regime has eased. Political organiza-

In Haiti, the United States supports a veritable rogues' gallery of pseudo-progressives and barely reformed thugs.

tions, if careful, can meet and speak out.

But while the invasion seemed to many Americans an abrupt change in U.S. policy, Washington's aims have really changed very little. The United States will try to foster formal democratic institutions capable of absorbing popular sentiment for radical transformation of Haitian society. But any official elected through such a process will be forced to accept an economic plan guaranteed to bring misery and political disempowerment to the vast majority of Haiti's people.

Real opposition to U.S.-imposed "structural adjustment" will have to come from the unco-opted Haitian "left." Beginning in the late '70s and accelerating through the '80s, a diverse, decentralized array of peasant development cooperatives, grass-roots political organizations, labor unions, human rights groups and Christian base communities gave Haiti's poor majority its first voice in Haitian politics and formed the skeleton for the country's first true civil society.

Catalyzed by the tenets of liberation theology, the popular movement mounted a serious challenge to the Duvalier regime, eventually forcing the United States to abandon its client. Four years later, the popular organizations provided the institutional backbone of the loosely structured Lavalas movement that swept Aristide to power in the December 1990 elections.

Following Aristide's ouster, popular resistance in large measure prevented the coup regime from consolidating power and settling into an internationally acceptable level of repression. And most Haitians remain highly politicized. Unfortunately, the circumstances of Aristide's return—on the back of U.S. military power and surrounded by a neoliberal cabinet—pose a difficult challenge for these organizations, many of them badly damaged by the repression. Aristide didn't hold his first meeting with popular organizations until more than a month after his return, and even then excluded many of the more militant organizations.

Although generally avoiding personal criticism of the president, several grass-roots organizations have strongly criticized the government's strategy of accommodation to U.S. military and economic power. The National Popular Assembly (ANP), an organization with roots in the militant north of the country, has called for an end to the occupation. The ANP is associated with the Brooklyn-based left newspaper *Häiti Progrès*, which describes Aristide's cabinet as a "cabinet of Macoutes," because of its close

ties to the business community, some of which benefited financially from the coup.

Aristide's defenders counter that the Haitian president made the best deal that he could. Father Hugo Triest, who represents the Haitian Conference of Religious on the nationwide Platform of Human Rights Organizations, feels that Aristide has not lost touch with the Haitian people. Triest believes that a deal was necessary to end the terror; nonetheless, Aristide "knows he is a prisoner. He can't do anything without the Americans." As Aristide himself put it to *The New Yorker's* Amy Wilentz, "the Americans are *the* factor in this hemisphere. If I had failed at negotiating with the United States, Cédras would still be here. People would still be dying by the tens and twenties."

But any discussion of the wisdom of Aristide's acquiescence to the U.S. agenda converges on a single point: Haiti's future depends on the ability of the Haitian people to organize and agitate against the Haitian elite and its paramilitaries, and against the overarching U.S. plan for the country. But that movement will have to go on independent of leadership from Aristide, who is isolated from his popular base. A senior Aristide official and two others close to Aristide say that he desperately needs popular organizations to become militant, so as to open up a space in which he can maneuver. "He can never say it publicly," said one aide, "but the only way he can fight back against the Americans is to say that the people are demanding change." ▲

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I N P R I N T

Sexless in America

By John K. Wilson

The notion that some crevice of American sexuality must be left unexplored seems strange in a time when bisexual swap-meets are a staple of after-school talk-shows. But look at the recent demise of Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders. She's a doctor. She was at a medical conference. She was in *uniform*. But one offhand remark about "perhaps" mentioning masturbation in sex-education classes, and she's busted for talking trash to America's youngsters.

Given this climate of prurience and hypocrisy, which stifles any serious discussion of sex in America, you've got to admire the chutzpah of the researchers who conducted the recent University of Chicago sex survey. The National Health and Social Life Survey, which studied 3,432 English-speaking Americans ages 18 through 59, is a smaller, privately funded version of a project that had been denied federal funding in 1991. Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) led the attack then, charging that the investigators were "avidly pro-homosexual." He won a ban against any study that might "legitimate homosexual lifestyles" and "sexual decadence." The researchers refused to follow the advice of nervous bureaucrats who told them to water down questions about controversial topics like onanism—after all, "masturbation is safe sex, so why ask about it?"

But Helms need not worry that the Way of Onan leads to Sodom and Gomorrah—instead, says the Chicago study, it leads to a nice home in the suburbs. According to the authors, America has few homosexuals, few adulterers, little risk of AIDS for heterosexuals, and a lot of sexually fulfilled married people. Newspaper headlines around the country trumpeted the study's "conservative findings," which were presented and interpreted in a layman's edition entitled *Sex in America*. "Survey finds most adults sexually staid," the *Washington Post* reported. "Americans lead conventional sex lives, contrary to popular notion," the *Wall Street Journal* concluded. The researchers primly concurred: "We have had the myth that everybody was out there having lots of

sex of all kinds," said John Gagnon. "Americans are far more conventional in their sexual conduct than we were led to believe," said Edward Laumann. He called the survey "good news for relationships" and added, "We are not somehow abandoning our moral principles."

The study and the media hoopla assert, *contra* Helms, that our modern sexual culture, far from spawning a fever-dream of debauchery, has safely imprisoned sex within the confines of bourgeois domesticity. Our moral principles remain intact, as long as by "moral principles" we mean a tasteful round of heterosexual serial monogamy capped by a complacent marriage. But as they tripped over themselves to praise our conventionality, journalists overlooked many contradictory findings and methodological flaws in the sex survey, lapses that cast serious doubt on its Stepford-sex conclusions.

The media often distorted the study's results to make them seem more "normal." *Time's* cover story reported that "Married couples have the most sex," even though the survey said that unmarried couples who live together have sex much more frequently. And the mainstream press virtually ignored one of the most disturbing findings about "conventional" sex in America: the prevalence of sexual coercion against children and women. Seventeen percent of women and 12 percent of men report that they were touched sexually before puberty, and 22 percent of women (but only a small number of men) said they had been forced by a man to perform a sexual act. In more than three-quarters of the cases, it was someone the woman knew well (22 percent), was in love with (46 percent), or married to (9 percent)—only 4 percent of the attackers were strangers.

And the study itself displays serious inconsistencies on some of its most salient points. In the survey, one widely reported number—the "fact" that the average man has six partners in his lifetime and the average woman has two—is unquestionably false. If most men and women are heterosexual, as the study claims, then mathematically the average number of sex partners for men and women must be roughly the same. Where then do men get these four additional partners? Are they farm animals? Inflatable dolls? The researchers admit that they "have no good answer" to the conundrum, although they speculate that "either men may exaggerate or women may understate." But since men don't report having more frequent sex than do women, it seems unlikely that they're exaggerating their sexual prowess.

Both men and women probably understated the number of their sex partners, because of a basic methodological flaw in the study. The survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews, a technique that critics say is bound to inhibit subjects' candor about "unconventional" sex practices. In fact, 6 percent of the interviews took place in front of the person's spouse or sex partner. This is hardly the way to get honest responses; the researchers admit that, "When interviewed alone, 17 percent of the respondents reported having two or more sex partners in the past year, while only 5 percent said so when their partners were present during the

interview." An additional 15 percent of the interviews took place in the presence of other people, usually children. Yet not one front-page story about the survey ever mentioned that one-fifth of the data may be tainted.

In violation of standard survey practices, which never tell people the reason for a survey lest it affect their answers, the researchers sent a letter to each respondent before the interview, asking them to participate so that doctors and teachers could "better understand and prevent the spread of diseases like AIDS, and better understand the nature and extent of harmful and healthy sexual behavior in our country." It's likely that people felt comfortable discussing "healthy" (monogamous) sex but were reluctant to admit to promiscuity, homosexuality, and other "harmful" habits.

One of the survey's most controversial findings was that only a small percentage of the American population is

sions: "AIDS is, and is likely to remain, confined to exactly the risk groups where it began: gay men and intravenous drug users and their sexual partners. We are convinced that there is not, and very likely never will be, a heterosexual AIDS epidemic in this country."

They justify this hope with the argument that, "The second of the necessary conditions for an HIV epidemic to take hold—multiple partners who themselves have multiple partners—is not fulfilled." But many heterosexuals *do* have multiple partners—33 percent of men and 9.2 percent of women admit to having more than 10 partners since the age of 18; the true numbers are probably much higher. Regular use of condoms is uncommon, and 18 percent of women and 16 percent of men (and many more of those with at least 10 partners) have had a sexually transmitted disease, which greatly increases the risk of getting AIDS. Sex in America is a complex, permeable web, not a bunch of quarantined sub-groups.

It would be stupid to say that everyone in America is equally at risk for AIDS, or to ignore the need for special attention to the groups hit hardest by the epidemic. But it is equally dangerous to ignore the gradual spread of AIDS into the heterosexual population or to downplay the importance of educational efforts that have saved thousands of lives and led more than 40 percent of young adults to alter their sexual behavior.

The study's message is deeply comforting to a media and entertainment industry still guilt-ridden about its own relentless commercialization of sexuality. So it should come as no surprise that the mainstream media has functioned as a PR machine for the survey, ignoring its problems and quoting

none of its critics. Unfortunately, the popular impressions about the survey are as much of a fairy tale as the sex myths it claims to dispel. Beneath the veneer of a happy, faithful, sexually-satisfied America presented by the study and its publicists is a reality many find uncomfortable: a sexually active America where men and women have multiple partners; where "aberrant" sexual practices and longings are not uncommon, but *are* commonly suppressed; where sexual abuse is an everyday torment for a large portion of the population.

As for those onanists, the survey says they comprise half the population. Forty percent of women and 60 percent of men said they masturbated in the past year. Those most likely to masturbate are white, middle-aged, married, well-educated, liberal men—guys like Bill Clinton. So if the "Middle-Class Bill of Rights" doesn't revive Clinton's numbers in the polls, perhaps he should tap into that huge pool of voters by re-hiring Joycelyn Elders and declaring a "Masturbation Bill of Rights."

John K. Wilson is the editor of *Democratic Culture* and the author of *The Myth of Political Correctness*, forthcoming from Duke University Press.



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homosexual. But the truth is more complicated. As the researchers observed, "the answer to the question of how many homosexuals there are depends very much on what you mean by 'homosexual.'" Most of the media, however, had no problem defining a homosexual, and simply reported the "fact" that only 2.8 percent of men and 1.4 percent of women were self-identified homosexuals or bisexuals. Few mentioned that 10.1 percent of men and 8.6 percent of women have had sex with a same-gender partner, desire to have sex with one, or find the idea of same-gender sex appealing. These numbers prove only that there is still a stigma against identifying oneself as homosexual; but instead they were used to buttress the myth that only a small elite is gay or lesbian.

The survey provoked some coded gay-bashing in the media. *US News & World Report* noted that, "Though fears of sexual deviance or dysfunction are unfounded for the vast majority of the population, there are distinct sub-groups with severe sexual sicknesses who do pose a danger to others." But the study is quick to reassure us that these deviants—gay men, drug users, minorities in general—are safely isolated far away from us "normal" people. This leads the authors to one of their most irresponsible conclu-

Mismanaged care

By John Canham-Clyne

In a less sophisticated, totalitarian society, Vicente Navarro would have been jailed long ago. But the U.S. government suppresses domestic dissent with physical coercion only in extreme cases. The preferred methods are derision and the erection of double and triple standards for left arguments—the techniques of propaganda marginalization so assiduously mastered by the corporate media.

Navarro has battled against corporate power—and for the health and well-being of working-class Americans—through a long and distinguished career as a physician, sociologist and political organizer. In his latest book, *Dangerous to Your Health*, Navarro reminds us what was missing from the puerile “health care reform debate” that has now mercifully drawn to a close—showing how the dangerously skewed class profile of American society reproduces itself in a health care industry dominated at the top by mostly white male physicians and administrators who make huge incomes while a predominantly female and minority rank-and-file work force labors for low wages. His book makes abundantly clear how and why the concentration of power in this country is very bad for your health and your pocketbook unless you happen to belong to the privileged classes.

Dangerous to Your Health originated as a series of lectures at Johns Hopkins University. The book, Navarro notes, is “written in nonacademic language to help people understand not so much what is wrong with the U.S.



Dangerous to Your Health: Capitalism in Health Care
By Vicente Navarro
Monthly Review Press
127 pp., \$10

health care system—the majority of Americans already know this because they suffer from it—but why it is wrong. A whole academic and media industry exists to obfuscate rather than clarify this critical question.”

The obfuscation is so pervasive that the U.S. government doesn’t even report health statistics by class. While anyone who wants to can easily discover the horrific differentials in health by race and gender, it is very difficult to find similar data broken down by class. Navarro, who served as senior health adviser to the Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns of 1984 and 1988, notes that the common interests of working-class African-Americans, Hispanics and whites are obscured by a powerful racism that ultimately serves corporate power. Their common interests would become much more clear, Navarro says, if health information were standardized by both race and class.

Consider the results of one of the federal government’s rare studies of mortality by class. In 1986, the feds published data on heart disease mortality—one of the most serious health problems in the country—by race, gender and class. A black woman was 1.5 times more likely to die from heart disease than a white woman, and black men died at a rate 1.2 times that of white men. Considering causes in a vacuum, one might argue that the increased morbidity rate is due to an African-American propensity for a poor diet. But the former argument pretty much dries up when one discovers that the blue-collar mortality rate is 2.3 times that of professionals and managers.

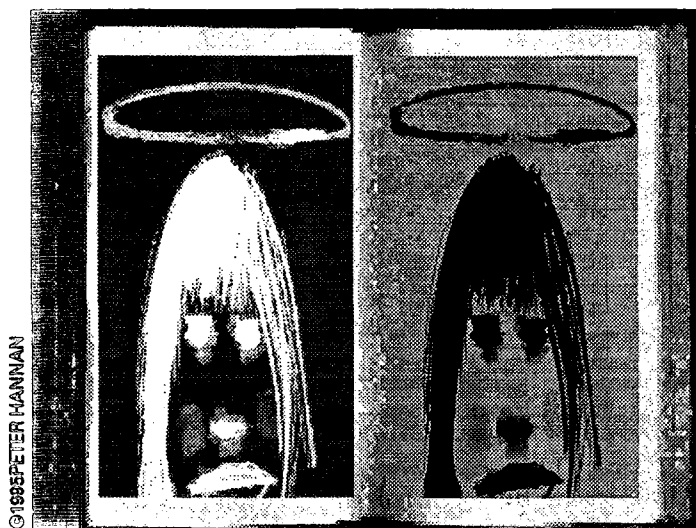
African-Americans are much more likely to be poor than whites, and so are also more likely to be dangerously unhealthy.

In the most ambitious chapter of *Dangerous to Your Health*, Navarro suggests that the strength of a nation’s health care system depends largely on the power of the working class in political life. Unlike most European industrial powers, in the United States “there is no mass-based political party that represents the interests of the working class. Instead, working-class interests have generally been channeled through the Democratic Party, whose leadership has ... been dominated by the upper and corporate classes.” This section of the book would have benefited from a more careful discussion of various health care and political systems. As it is, Navarro offers only a few examples to back up his argument and moves far too quickly through the historical background.

But Navarro’s brevity is also a strength. In just a few pages, Navarro lays open the most deadly of the fatal flaws afflicting American medicine. The magical forces of the market—which the president and everyone to the right of him want to unleash on us—simply do not work to achieve universal, high quality health care for all citizens. Never have. Never will.

John Canham-Clyne, *In These Times*’ Washington correspondent, is the author with David Himmelstein and Steffie Woolhandler of *The Rational Option for a National Health Care Program*, forthcoming from Pamphleter’s Press.

SPEED READING



Face of an Angel
By Denise Chavez
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
458 pp., \$23

Since 1990, when Oscar Hijuelos won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, we have witnessed a renaissance of Latino fiction in English. A handful of increasingly famous writers, mostly in their 40s, are producing popular novels, nonfiction volumes and stories. And more importantly, mainstream publishers and a growing, loyal readership are embracing the new literary trend. When this literary boom is reassessed a couple of decades from now, a foreseeable conclusion is likely to emerge. And that is that, in spite of the hoopla, much of the Latino fiction of this *fin de siècle* fits the academic category of "standard ethnic writing." To a large extent, what we get from writers once published by small presses and now promoted by New York houses are fairly conventional genealogical stories about misery and redemption, narratives with immigrant families as protagonists who recollect the way in which they overcame incredible odds to be part of the American Dream.

Born in Las Cruces, N.M., in 1948, Denise Chavez, an unquestionably talented storyteller, serves as one more compelling example. At age 38, with a masters degree in creative writing and a teaching job in the Southwest, Chavez published an impressive collection of short stories, *The Last of the Menu Girls*. The imprint that brought it out was Arte Publico Press, a small press in Houston fully devoted to promoting Hispanic fiction north of the Rio Grande. And although it received only a few reviews, the title story was adapted for the stage, and Chavez attracted enough atten-

tion from New York editors for her next project. Meanwhile, she also became a successful performance artist with a one-woman show, "Women in the State of Grace," with which she toured the nation.

Eight years later, she now has a literary breakthrough with her first novel, *Face of an Angel*. Set in Agua Oscura, a small town in New Mexico (population 500 at the end of the 19th century), its sympathetic protagonist is Soveida Dosamantes, a waitress for 30 years at El Farol Mexican Restaurant, around whom rotates a galaxy of secondary characters—more than the reader can eventually care for. As in standard ethnic writing, we first find Soveida as an adult, recollecting individual and family experiences. She names her grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins and friends, and soon after she begins to track down their individual stories. Chavez apparently believes that in order for us to get acquainted with her heroine, the narrator needs to map her entire family past, from 1885 to the present. In that sense, *Face of an Angel* is a perfect model of modern Chicano fiction, always obsessed with geographic and family roots.

As the plot unravels, we concentrate on Soveida's years as a waitress and her current undertaking, the writing of a handbook for waitresses called "The Book of Service." We also follow her through her relationships with her grandmother Mama Lupita and the restaurant manager Larry Larragoite, her two marriages and one divorce, the undergraduate work done at a community college, and many etceteras that involve frightening sexual scenes. In the end, Soveida emerges as a survivor, the quintessential archetype in ethnic literature.

Chavez has unquestionable artistic stamina. She stylistically juxtaposes Spanish and English terms, Anglo and Hispanic cultures, in a commanding fashion that recalls the oeuvre of Sandra Cisneros. But her novel, an indictment of our male-dominated society, fails to go beyond the trendy. Using as a leitmotif the Spanish phrase *mi modo*, meaning that a person accepts what cannot be done, she furnishes her universe with nachos and *ranchera* songs, religious paraphernalia and references to the ubiquitous Virgin of Guadalupe that shed no new light on the Latino experience.

The heart of the novel is invaded by sheer melodrama. And therein, precisely, lies my main complaint. Although *Face of an Angel* will turn out to be a crowd pleaser, it is evidence of the lack of aesthetic maturity of the current Latino renaissance. To a large extent, writers seem to be content with producing commercially attractive fiction about victimhood, narratives that cry, "Hey! Here I am!... Pay attention to me!" but fail to become truly universal.

One could argue that melodrama, found in Mexican soap operas and black-and-white Spanish films, is a fundamental component of the Hispanic psyche. But one expects artists to inject a dose of sophistication into their work, a sense of parody and satire. One expects them to take a step back from popular culture in order to offer a refreshingly different perspective. Commercially speaking, Chavez's book will most likely be a winner, but we have certainly

reached the point where Latino fiction ought to be more complex.
—Ilan Stavans

The Political Companion to American Film

Edited by Gary Crowds

Lake View Press

540 pp., \$50

There are lots of places you can learn the real name of John Ford (Sean Aloysius O'Feama). But if you want an incisive look at Ford's vision of American society look no further than *The Political Companion to American Film*, an indispensable collection of essays edited by Gary Crowds, founder and longtime editor of the well-regarded magazine *Cineaste*.

The Political Companion is a refreshing departure from the glitz-and-auteur fascination that distorts most popular film criticism. While avoiding the jargon of academic commentary, Crowds' book also escapes the dictates of Hollywood's public relations machine. In *Cineaste* Crowds has consistently encouraged an exploration of the ideological implications of film in everyday language. And one can only herald the book's assertion that within Hollywood entertainment there is an extant—if often incoherent—ideology, a perspective that puts this collection at odds with most accessible writing on film.

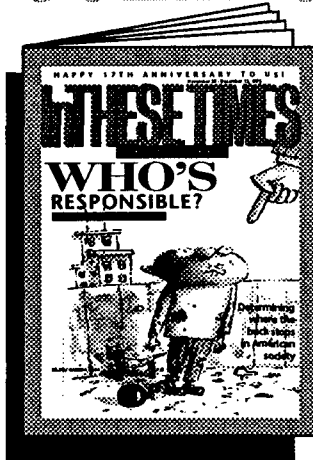
The Political Companion avoids mechanistic definitions

of politics—focusing broadly on the “social or political context” of filmmaking and not just on the economic structures of the studios. Politics takes on an even looser meaning in Ed Asner's foreword, in which he associates the term with “personal conviction,” his *sine qua non* for both making and watching movies.

The collection is pleasantly idiosyncratic and faintly middle-aged, focusing on Hollywood's star directors (Chaplin, Sturges); genres (film noir, road movies); self-styled auteurs (Brian DePalma, Martin Scorsese and Paul Schrader); and on some issues near and dear to the left. In *These Times* film critic Pat Dowell elegantly draws a parallel between the rise of Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry*, the neocons and Ronald Reagan. Theme essays include “Gays and lesbians in the cinema,” “The Hollywood blacklist,” and “Vietnam war films.”

But don't come here seeking information on women directors, independent or subcultural filmmaking, or on the recent economic transformation of the industry. And if you want a heavy dose of current film theory, the most you'll get is an overview by academic Robert Stam. Fortunately, Stam's call for “a critical practice which combines the interdisciplinary thrust of first-phase semiology with the critique of mastery of poststructuralist currents,” goes blissfully unheard here. Taken on their own terms, the essays in *The Political Companion* provide convincing evidence that uncovering the “social or political context” of commercial moviemaking is crucial to any understanding of American film.
—Pat Aufderheide

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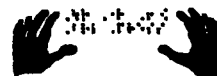
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and the State and Justice Department's Administration of Justice project, aims to maintain Haiti as a low-wage, export platform that is friendly to multinational capital. (See "Curse of the zombie," page 29.)

What makes the U.S. occupation so difficult to fit into the ideological categories of either left or right, however, is that the Haitian people have for the most part welcomed the U.S. presence. There can be no question that they are better off today than they were at the beginning of October. The Haitians that I talked to harbored few illusions about the ultimate aims of the U.S. occupation—"a rich country is never the friend of a poor country," said my guide in Cité Soleil—but they have perceived an odd convergence of U.S. and Haitian interests, a historically unprecedented concurrence of the U.S. government's desire to ensure stability for multinational capital and the Haitian people's desire not to get shot. The occupation has opened up a space in which the Haitian people's cultural disposition for democratic organization can flourish.

Thus, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide finds himself in an uncomfortable predicament. On one hand, he wants to protect this space, enlarge it, and shelter the popular organizations that are just now recovering from their decimation under the coup. On the other hand, in order to do so he must submit to a foreign government that has not in the past—and there is no particular reason to think this has changed—had the best interests of the Haitian people at heart.

The predicament calls to mind a story that Aristide recounted in his book *In the Parish of the Poor*. In 1986, just three months after Jean-Claude Duvalier fled Haiti, members of the army and police had arrested several of Aristide's parishioners. He went to the prison, the notorious Fort Dimanche, to try to rescue them:

"[The chief] arrived with his hypocritically courteous attitude, his head down like a beast that submits to the yoke, almost as if he were about to kiss my feet, he was so nice. Diplomacy, however, cannot be confused with kindness.

"But I was on a mission, and I had to obey certain laws of the house. So I obeyed them, for the good of the cause. I gave this man my hand; he invited me to sit down with him ... And so we talked on, in French, a meaningless patter of hypocritical politesse. ... [Finally] I took those people out of that dark place of evildoers, the chief accompanying us to the very threshold. He shook my hand there, and of course I thanked him very nicely."

From conversations with officials in his government and sources close to Aristide, it has become clear to me that Aristide is dealing with the U.S. government in the same way that he dealt with that police chief. He is playing the game, making polite conversation, swallowing his dignity, in order to save his people. This is why so many denunciations of Aristide from the left seem unwarranted. Yes, he is cooperating with U.S. forces, yes, he has preached reconciliation when his people want justice; but it is not clear that his people would be better off if he refused to do so.

It is clear, however, that as a consequence of his compromised position Aristide is no longer on the leading edge of the popular movement. Most Haitians still look upon him as a hero, but the leaders of the popular organizations have made it plain that they want to remain independent from his administration so as not to lose direct allegiance to the interests of their people. Indeed, the Aristide administration is tacitly encouraging the popular organizations to retain their autonomy. "The government cannot do much by itself," said Claudette Werleigh, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, speaking of the constraints imposed by the occupation. "It is up to the Haitian people to help us make change."

Which is precisely what the Haitian people are doing. In the small town of Grand Goâve, for instance, people are not waiting for democracy; they are making it themselves.

Monday, November 7, was the first day of school at Lycée Nationale de Grand Goâve, the six-room secondary school at the northern edge of town. The townsfolk had been unhappy in the previous year because the five teachers and the principal, all of whom had been appointed during the coup by a Duvalierist magistrate, had rarely shown up to class. So the good citizens of Grand Goâve decided to take over the school.

Students came to class at the usual time, found their assigned classroom, and sat in their assigned seats. But on this particular Monday, the Macoutist teachers were huddling in the principal's office, cowed by the presence of a good fraction of the population of Grand Goâve in the schoolyard. In their place, classes were conducted by leaders of two community organizations, who discussed with the students—all of whom had had a say in choosing the new teachers and principal for the school—how democracy is something you have to work for. Everyone then assembled around a portable amplifier in the schoolyard. The new principal said hello. An organizer announced that the school would from now on be named Lycée Fito Gracea, after a militant killed in 1969. And the old Macoutist teachers slipped quietly out the back gate, in all likelihood never to return again.

The strategy of the popular organizations in Haiti has been to mobilize, as in Grand Goâve, around immediate circumstances of the poor, around their day-to-day problems and conflicts. In this sense, the truly grass-roots character of the popular organizations, and their decentralization, which have been cited as weaknesses, as reasons why they have been unable to build a broad national front, prove to be profound strengths. For there is little chance that the U.S. agencies—despite their sophisticated techniques—will succeed in bringing these organizations under their influence. Once people have tasted their own power, it is not easy to make them forget. ◀

Eric Verhoogen, a former union organizer with District 1199/SEIU in Ohio, is currently working as a journalist in San Francisco. A version of this story first appeared in *CrossRoads* magazine.

IN THE END

Freedom riders

By Eric Verhoogen

On a hot afternoon in early November, on a bumpy road in the Haitian countryside, I shared the back of a 1978 Toyota half-ton pick-up with a 20-kilo sack of rice, several bags of banana rinds (dinner for a fortunate pig), assorted bits of charcoal and 26 other passengers. Trucks like these are called *tap-taps* in Creole because you knock twice on the side of the truck to tell the driver to stop.

As you might expect, fitting 27 people in the back of a pick-up requires some imagination. I was sitting on the sidewall of the truck with an elderly woman—whom I did not know—more or less on my lap. I was one of the lucky ones who could hold on to the truck; most folks were standing in the no-man's land in the middle of the flatbed, or on the open tailgate at the back, more than an arm's length from any graspable metal. It is part of the culture and tradition of the *tap-tap* to solve this problem by holding on to one another. I clasped hands with a young man in a dirty Malcolm X hat, who linked elbows with another man in a K-Mart T-shirt, who held on to someone clinging to the other sidewall. In this way we formed a sort of restraining wall across the back of the truck, hemming in the mass of people ahead of us, who were for their part holding fast to each other's wrists and knees and shoulders and belt-loops.

It occurred to me, riding down that country road, that the *tap-tap* might have stood for more than what it seemed; that the *tap-tap* and its culture represented, in miniature form, the situation of the Haitian people as a whole: traveling down a treacherous and poorly paved road, forced to detour around potholes, in a creaking and lurching and basically inadequate vehicle, but confident that the journey would reach a successful conclusion. And the particular structure of our *tap-tap*, with its lack of solid metal to hang on to, reminded us of a fundamental political truth: if one of us falls off the truck, we all fall, so we had better hold tight to one another.

Of course, not everyone in Haiti rides in a *tap-tap*. Occa-



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sionally, we were passed by a Jeep Cherokee or Isuzu Trooper, driven by a member of Haiti's elite, who would never have considered riding with us. As one grass-roots activist said to me, "We are two nations in one society." The sharp polarization of Haitian society and its history of struggle has produced in the country's popular culture a pronounced emphasis on democratic organization. Everywhere you go, people are organizing themselves, in the schools and slums and rice fields and markets. "Why?" I asked a young man in Cité Soleil, a slum in Port-au-Prince, who had offered to be my guide for free. "We don't have any power," he said, "and we don't have any guns. That's why we need organization." This was a young man with little formal education, who had never held a steady job and at the moment had no hope of finding one, yet he understood keenly the received wisdom of his people: that without disciplined, organized, collective work there can be no progress.

Currently, the U.S. government is attempting to bring Haiti's culture of democratic resistance under a new form of social control—one less brutal than that of the Duvaliers and the Tontons Macoutes, but only marginally more democratic. The main thrust of the U.S. strategy is to build within the key institutions of Haitian society a "moderate," neo-liberal majority that can both maintain international legitimacy (which the country's army could not) and provide the political momentum to carry out what has become known as "The American Plan." This strategy, which is being implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development

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